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BENGAL
under
AKBAR AND JAHANGIR

An Introductory Study In Social History

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MUNSHIRAM MANOHARLAL, DELHI.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present work is to give an introductory account of social life in Bengal from the time of the initial conquest by the Mughals to Jahangir's death, covering roughly the first half-century of Mughal rule. The two landmarks in political history have been chosen because they conveniently demarcate a socially significant period. This period witnessed the emergence of new forces which deeply influenced the development of the Bengali people. The first part of the present treatise attempts to work out in detail the implications of these new forces. The second describes the social life of the period and analyses its bases.

The connotation of the term 'social history' is somewhat vague and hence an explanation of the sense in which it has been used in the present context seems called for. Its scope has been defined "as the daily life of the inhabitants of the land in past ages". "This includes," explains Trevelyan, "the human as well as the economic relation of different classes to one another, the character of family and household life, the conditions of labour and of leisure, the attitude of man to nature, the culture of each age as it arose out of these general conditions of life, and took ever changing forms in religion, literature and music, architecture, learning and thought". In short, the scope of social history is as wide as the past activities of man in society. Accordingly, the present work attempts to cover all that was significant in the life of the period under review.

A work on social history has to deal with diverse aspects of a past epoch. So it presupposes a certain amount of spadework on a number of distinct subjects. On most of the numerous aspects of mediaeval Bengali life this necessary spadework has not been done. Still enough materials have been already unearthed to justify an attempt to reconstruct the social history of Bengal in the early Mughal days. The contemporary Persian chronicles, the travellers' accounts, the literature of the period and the religious texts of the Vaishnavas, the Tantrikas and the

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Sahajiyas together constitute a considerable volume. Full justice can be done to the subject only if these sources are worked upon for a number of years, preferably by specialists in the various branches. Yet at the same time it seems also possible to sketch a rough outline on the basis of a close scrutiny of a comparatively limited amount of materials of a representative character. Pending further investigation, such an outline might serve as a workable introduction to the subject. The present volume, meant only to be an introduction of this sort, is hence based on a comparatively few contemporary works selected from the total number available. In making this selection care has been taken to leave out nothing of any real importance, while such works as only repeat information already available in more representative ones have generally been ignored. Some of the non-contemporary works belonging to periods at the most a few decades earlier or later have also been used. In a country like Bengal where things moved rather slowly in the past, the accounts contained in non-contemporary works often present a picture substantially the same as that of a proximate epoch. But the data collected from such sources have been always checked up by a comparison with contemporary accounts.

In discussing the various topics, their relative importance has of course been kept in view. But certain aspects have been treated very briefly due to the paucity of relevant data while greater space has been devoted to comparatively less important ones as more information is available with regard to these. Besides, those facts of life which closely resembled their present-day counterparts have also been barely touched upon. Some of the topics included in this work,—Nayanyaya for instance,—are too technical to be adequately treated by any one except a specialist. With regard to these, the present work only gives faithful summaries of authoritative works on the subjects concerned. Religious texts have been studied from a common sense point of view for the collection of socially significant data. I have sought the help of specialists in interpreting the relevant passages. Still if these passages contain, as is often claimed, some esoteric meaning not obvious to the uninitiated, I must be excused for ignoring it.

A very important topic, viz., caste, had to be left out in view

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of the paucity of available data. The only contemporary or near-contemporary works on the topic with any established claim to genuineness are the *Chandraprabha* and the *Sadvaidya-Kulapanjika*, two annals of the Vaidya caste. Besides, the *Chandimangala* of Mukundarama gives a long list of castes. All the other works dealing with caste history which are recognised as genuine belong either to a much earlier or to a much later period.

A question may pertinently be asked as to whether it is possible to delineate the social life of a people as slow-moving as the mediaeval Bengalis during any particular half-century of their history and distinguish it from their life in other proximate epochs. The answer to that question is of course partly in the negative. For the daily life of the Bengalis throughout the 16th and 17th centuries followed more or less the same unvarying pattern. But the description of the day to day life contained in the present work, based as it is on contemporary sources, is surely true of the period under review, though it may be nearly as true of the proximate epochs. And then there were the distinguishing features. The new forces at work, certain special trends in the religious and even in the economic life of the period, the life of the foreigners resident in this country,—in many ways different from that in the periods to follow,—together gave a distinctive character to the first half-century of Mughal rule in Bengal.

Here I should like to acknowledge the valuable help which I have received from many scholars in preparing this volume. Sir Jadunath Sarkar kindly lent me some of the manuscripts in his collection, allowed me to use his unpublished notes and translations from Persian sources, read the manuscript and suggested many improvements. I am also indebted to Dr. S.N. Sen, formerly Vice-Chancellor, Delhi University and Dr. I.B. Banerji, Asutosh Professor of Mediaeval and Modern Indian History, Calcutta University for various useful suggestions. Dr. Sukumar Sen of the Department of Modern Indian languages, Calcutta University and Dr. Nihar Ranjan Ray, Bagisvari Professor of Fine Arts, Calcutta University read some parts of the manuscript, pointed out some mistakes and suggested new lines of enquiry. Sri Dineschandra Bhattacharya of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Prof. Chintaharan Chakra-

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varti of the Krishnagore College and Sri S.K. Saraswati, Librarian, Asiatic Society helped me in collecting materials. Dr. Narendra Krishna Sinha and Dr. Anilchandra Banerji, my teachers and now my colleagues, have helped me in many different ways from the very beginning of this work. I am also indebted to my friend Shri Arunkumar Das Gupta of the Central Calcutta College who took a great interest in this work and helped me to arrive at many of the conclusions. Sri Taritkumar Mukherji of the Central Calcutta College very kindly prepared the index with painstaking care.

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Diacritical marks have been altogether omitted in the text. But to facilitate correct reading I am appending below a short illustrative list of some less familiar words with the appropriate diacritical marks.

Abhichāra
Annaprāśana
Beḍā Bhāsān
Beruṇiyā
Gauranāgarabhāva
Gaurapāramyavāda
Hāts
Kāpālikas
Kulāchāra
Navyanyāya
Parakiyā
Paśvāchāra
Rāgānugā
Rāḍha
Śākta
Sādhanā
Sahajiyā

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AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO THE SECOND IMPRESSION

I

Only a fortunate few can look back on their first academic effort with comfortable self-assurance. The present writer is not one of them. Re-reading something one wrote fifteen years ago,—when one's equipment was even poorer than it is now,—can be a highly embarrassing experience. Having gone through it, I felt less than enthusiastic about having this volume reprinted. I repressed these probably sensible hesitations mainly for one reason.

The material brought together in this volume has been collected and arranged on the basis of a single criterion, viz., commonsense or the lack of it. A fresh look at the same data in terms of the methods and approaches of social anthropology can provide new insights into the nature of mediaeval Bengali society and its processes of change. Hence the decision to reprint this volume and this somewhat lengthy prefatory exercise in method, which explores certain implications of the data not brought out in the text.

Let me begin with a negative statement. The sub-title to this volume is misleading. As it now stands, the book is *not* a "study in social history", introductory or otherwise, though it contains a fair amount of material which is the stuff of social history. The mistaken description is linked to an incorrect definition,—the one quoted from Trevelyan in the introduction to the volume,—which inflates the scope of the subject to include all history, with politics not quite left out. If the scope of social history is as wide as the activity of man in society,—and that without any clarity of focus,—then there is hardly any point in using the qualifying adjective.

Social historians,—some consciously, others less so,—have

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moved away from such omnibus definitions, but as yet there is no clearly articulated consensus as to the limits and legitimate contents of the subject. For the purposes of the present note, I shall accept the following definition: "investigation of historical communities by the methods of social anthropology or sociology,"[1] particularly the former, because it has greater relevance to the study of such pre-industrial and relatively small scale communities as are the subject matter of this volume. Like most definitions of wide-ranging subjects, this one is of course somewhat arbitrary. Its major advantage consists in the fact that social anthropology, unlike 'orthodox' social history, has a clearly defined focus and method for the study of societies. If it has not discovered 'laws', the mass of ethnographic data collected by social anthropologists in pursuit of theoretically defined research aims has revealed striking regularities in human institutions and in the institutionalised response of groups and individuals to similar situations. We have here an empirically tested framework of reference which is a better guide than purely subjective intuition in deciding what to look for and how to inter-relate one's findings in the study of man's social past. Further, one is made aware of dimensions,—of implications of actions and institutions,—which are by no means obvious from the data.

In terms of our definition, social history is a study of different kinds of institutionalised relationships, i.e., relatively enduring features of human associations, in the past ages and their experience of change over time. The ideas, values and expectations associated with the institutions are also within its legitimate scope.[2] Our problem of definition does not, however, end here. If social history is a study of relationships, what is the relevant unit of reference? Whose relationships and what relationships are one to study? The answers to these

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[1] See John Beattie, *Other Cultures—Aims, Methods and Achievements in Social Anthropology* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964; Paperback edition, 1966), 14. The words quoted are not meant by the author to be a definition of social history. I have used them as such for reasons explained below.

[2] J. Beattie, *op. cit.*, Ch. I

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questions remain somewhat imprecise.[1] In an isolated small-scale community, the unit to be investigated is physically distinct. Only the systems of social relationships binding the members of the community together in a variety of mutual bonds are not physical entities, but constructs which the observer has to build up. The unit of reference in a more complex and spread-out community,—like the mediaeval Bengali society,—cannot be physically identified with the same ease. We may at best identify this society with the people living in the geographical territory of Bengal and speaking for generations the Bengali language; but such a definition has obvious loopholes.

The question as to what relationships do we explore is somewhat easier to answer. The nature of human associations differs according to the nature of particular activities so that we have so many "social fields" within each of which the individual members of a society are bound together in a particular web of relationships. The pattern of relationships in one 'field', say, the economic, modulates the pattern in others, so that at one level what is to be studied is the relationship between the relationships. "All the relations of all kinds . . . are thought of as a network in which people are the knots or points, and relationships, of whatever kind, are the threads or lines"[2]. Our subject-matter, then, is the arrangements subsisting in the various areas of social life,—at a point of time as also over time,—the mutual connections between these arrangements as also the ends which particular institutions and arrangements serve in a given context. These ends may be the same as the ostensible objective in view or something very different and unsuspected.[3] There is no way yet of ensuring, however, that our account covers the entire social system, for

1. For a discussion of this question, see A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society—Essays and Addresses* (Cohen and West, London, 6th Impression, 1965) Ch. X.

2. Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture—An Anthropological Approach to Civilisation* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956), Ch. II.

3. Robert K. Merton, "Manifest and latent Functions", Ch. I. in *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Free Press Glencoe, Illinois, Ninth Printing, 1964).

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what 'aspects' of society together constitute the totality remains an unsolved problem. The best one can hope to do is to cover various aspects of social life in their interrelations,—without hoping to exhaust the range of possibilities.

The above elementary discourse in social anthropology has a limited purpose, viz., to indicate the lines along which an investigation into and rearrangement of the data presented in the text are suggested below in this note. The broad approach outlined above can provide insights which are by no means mere jargonised banalities; and this, despite the severe limitations of source material. One fact, however, should be borne in mind. Interrelations, which have often to be guessed from raw data, cannot be 'proved' in the same way as the occurrence of a particular event can be. The difficulty is all the greater where the relevant material is scanty. We have at best circumstantial evidence suggesting a possibility, strong where the data are plentiful, weak elsewhere.

II

For reconstructing the picture of the Bengali society in the early days of the Mughal rule, the data available are unsatisfactory at two levels. The information regarding most aspects of social life,—the family and kinship systems, social stratification, political organisation, beliefs and rituals etc.,—is extremely inadequate, though not uniformly so. It is as if only a few pieces of a jigsaw puzzle have accidentally survived. Carefully pieced together, they suggest at best a faint broken silhouette, with one limb here, another there, coming out in clear detail.

The second difficulty is in a way even more serious. The data have a limited focus, covering in any depth only small segments of the total population. The central figure in the indigenous literary and religious texts,—our chief source of information,—is the Brahminical Hindu, a person belonging to some upper stratum of the caste society, his world view and life style determined by Puranic mythology, commonplaces of the Indian philosophic tradition and the regulations embodied in the Smriti literature,—the eighteen *tattvas* of Raghunandana in particular. If he shares with men of lower ritual status belief in magic and the occult powers which are not parts of the

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Brahminical "Great Tradition", such beliefs and the associated rituals had already achieved apotheosis in the works of Raghunandana himself. Within the main focus of our source material are also included the various sects partly in revolt against the world view and rigid regulations of the 'traditional' way of life. We see them in our period in the process of reabsorption into the orthodox caste order and the life-style of the upper caste Hindu, though the beginnings of a fresh departure from the anti-orgiastic tendencies of Brahminical orthodoxy is already there.

The picture grows increasingly hazy as one moves from the centre of the focus towards the periphery where the mass of agriculturists, artisans, village servants, tribal people, slaves etc. appear briefly as sketchy, shadowy figures, despite some supplementary information provided by the Persian chronicles and the non-indigenous sources. There is some clarity as to the economic function of these groups—"peripheral" from the point of view of our sources. Perhaps the available descriptions of their life-habits and standard of living are also authentic enough in matters of detail. But when punctilious observance of Brahminical rituals and concern for caste values are attributed to semi-nomadic hunters, the credibility of our information has to be questioned. Even our knowledge of political organization does not go below the levels of the village headmen,—a statement which no longer applies to other parts of medieval India.[1] Hence our knowledge of medieval Bengali society is confined, by and large, to the genteel

[1] A substantial body of literature concerning the agrarian system of mediaeval India has been published in recent years. Even where their central theme is the economic relationship, they provide a fairly clear picture of the political and administrative organization at the village level. The village level organization in mediaeval Bengal is, however, by and large excluded from the scope of these works. See Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Asia Publishing House, 1963); B.R. Grover, "Nature of Land Rights in Mughal India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. I, No. 1, "Nature of *Dehat-i-Taaluqa* (Zamindari villages) and the evolution of the Taaluqdari System during the Mughal Age", *ibid*, Vol. II, Nos. 2 and 3, S. Nurul Hasan, "The Position of the Zamindars in the Mughal Empire," *ibid*, Vol. I, No. 4, N.A. Siddiqi, "The classification of villages under the Mughals." *ibid*, Vol. I, No. 3.

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upper strata,—'upper' in terms of power, wealth or ritual status. The masses come authentically into the picture only so far as certain limited aspects of their lives are concerned.

The social life of the Muslims in Bengal has been discussed in this volume mainly on the basis of references in the writings of 'outsiders', except for the works of the court poets of Arakan. Such writings tell us very little about the structure of the Bengali Muslim society. Dr. Abdul Karim's pioneer work on the Muslims in Mediaeval Bengal,[1] despite its great value for religious and cultural history, has not added substantially to our knowledge of social structure, evidently because the relevant data are not available.

III

Marriage, family and kinship systems, as also the norms and ideas associated with them, show a remarkable continuity in Bengali society. The somewhat sketchy picture which emerges from our sources would still be valid in many essential details for the rural or even urban social groups.

The extreme emphasis on *kula*[2] or the right family in the

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1 Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslims of Bengal (down to 1538)* (Dacca, 1959).

2 Bengali literature of the period is replete with references to the importance of marrying one's daughter into the right *Kula*. See, for instance, *Chandimangala*, 14: "*akuline dile sutā, sabhā mājhe hent māthā . . . baḍa punye pāi kulajan! . . . mili yata vandhujan, dasdike deha man, yathā pāo amalin kul!*" (Translation. "If I give my daughter to anyone but a *Kulin*, I shall be humiliated,. . . .it is only as a result of great meritorious acts that one may find (as a son-in-law) a person from a good family (*Kula*),. . . .Let all friends look around in every direction for a family free from blemish.")

As indicated above, this introductory note is not based on any fresh research, but is mainly an attempt to reinterpret the data presented in the text. However, on re-reading some of the source material, I felt that I had missed the implication of some significant data. The references to the sources in these foot-notes are mainly confined to two texts, the *Chandimangala* and Raghunandana's *Ashtavimsati-tattvani* (hereafter referred to as *Chandi* and *Raghu* respectively). As should be evident from the notes at the end of the chapters, the information derived from these two texts are repeated copiously in other Bengali literary works. Since the purpose of this note is mainly to illustrate the possibilities of a particular line of investigation, the references in the foot-notes to the other literary works have been kept to a minimum.

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selection of the bridegroom must have been linked to the usual practice of endogamy within the subcaste and exogamy in relation to one's *gotra*, i.e., line of descent from some eponymous ancestor. In so far as marriage was a factor in inter-group cohesion, the most important unit of reference was not the *gotra* but the *kula* or the extended family, though the formal rules regarding endogamy and exogamy referred to the *gotra* and not the *kula*.[1] Besides, the choice of the right *kula* for matrimonial relationship involved an element of discretion based on complex and somewhat imprecise criteria while the range of choice as to the *gotra* one could marry into was clearly defined. For all practical purposes, other than matrimony, however, one's membership of a *gotra* was notional, while every person was a member of an extended family in a very real sense. Since, however, the *kula* was a part of *gotra* the system of marriage also entailed a relationship between widely scattered though not very cohesive social groups. In theory, all members of one's own *gotra* were one's kins and, for men, all members of the *gotra* one married into were one's affines.

The status ranking of a *kula* was based primarily on ritual considerations, i.e., its relative perfection in terms of the conduct expected of its caste, and of orthodox Hindus generally, but purely secular criteria like social prestige in the eyes of the local political authority or correct professional behaviour were also important determinants.[2] 'Loss of face' in the public eye, whatever the occasion, could be a serious negative factor. The norms concerning status ranking and right conduct were expressed as also reinforced by the emphasis on the ideal marital alliance. The important fact was that the relevant virtues and failings did not refer merely or even mainly to the bridegroom, but to the entire extended family. The social prestige from a desirable alliance similarly accrued to the bride's family, though particularly to the bride's father. The aspect of sanction, i.e. social opprobrium or loss of face in case the bridegroom came from the wrong *kula*, was probably a

1 *Raghu, Udvahatattvam*, 463.

2 *Chandi*, 145, 221. See *infra* 64f, for a more detailed discussion of this question.

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stronger influence on conduct than any positive status dividend from a correct alliance.

One fact, however, needs to be emphasized. The anxiety to secure marital relationship with the right *kula* appears to have been far greater when one was marrying off one's daughter than in connection with one's son's marriage. In fact, one hardly comes across any reference to *kula* in the latter context. In extolling the eligibility of a prospective bride, it is her physical beauty which is mainly emphasized.[1] This asymmetrical pattern fits in with the difference in attitude towards the sex morals of men and women. The caste regulations and values were evidently flexible enough to accommodate up to a point natural male preferences in matters of marriage, but far less so with regard to women's likes and dislikes.[2]

So far as one can see, for most social groups, the modal pattern of marital behaviour was monogamous, though there was no moral disapproval of polygyny. To be married to a polygynous husband was, however, recognized as a serious misfortune for a girl, though the possibility of friendly relations between co-wives was not altogether precluded.[3] Typically, a polygynous marriage was considered desirable from the view-point of the bride's family, if the bridegroom happened to be from a particularly desirable *kula*, a fact largely responsible for the proliferation of *kulin* polygyny.[4] Polygyny, formal and informal, also appears to have been common among the classes wielding political authority. The only disapproval associated with this practice was functional in origin and referred exclusively to neglect of 'kingly' duties through preoccupation with pleasure.[5] Though the relevant data are very scanty, it seems that polygyny was fairly common among the richer

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1 *Chandi*, 142 : The merchant Dhanapati is portrayed as wanting to marry Khullana, because of her great beauty, without any initial query as to the desirability of the alliance from the view-point of caste values.

2 *Ibid*, 144-145 : Khullana's mother is described as being very upset at the prospect of her daughter being given in marriage to a bigamous husband. The father, more concerned with considerations of *Kula*, brushes aside the objection ostensibly on astrological grounds.

3 *Ibid*, 145, 163 ; *infra*, 215.

4 *Ibid*, 139.

5 *Ibid*, 61.

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Muslims, and it is not even clear that marriage to a polygynous husband was considered a misfortune for a Muslim girl. The Muslim merchants' separate establishments complete with wives in their several places of business mentioned by Schouten do not appear to have had any counterpart in Hindu society.[1]

However, the Hindu attitude to sex, as revealed in the contemporary literature, indicates no puritanical preferences, though the orgiastic practices of the Tantric *kulacharins* were no doubt repugnant to many an ordinary householder and held in abhorrence by the Vaishnavas in particular.[2] There was no special secrecy about the facts of sex : the *panchalis* replete with references to or descriptions of the act of sex were sung in public, presumably before mixed audiences of men, women and children.[3] There is no apotheosis of abstinence or self-denial in the literature of the period. In a society not too rich in material amenities, enjoyment of life mainly meant dietary variation and pleasures of sex. There is a certain preoccupation with both in our literary sources. Marriage was not conceived,—as in the best *sastric* tradition,—primarily as a *samskara*, a necessary part of the householder's *dharma*, the means towards the end of repaying one's debt to one's ancestors. The *sastric* preoccupation with continence is clearly articulated only in Raghunandana's *smriti*. A man cohabiting only on the ritually prescribed days is described there in approving terms as one who is like a *brahmacharin*, a celibate.[4] Continence, as a norm, however, does not figure anywhere in contemporary Bengali literature. On the contrary our authors evidently delight in the description of physical love in all their accounts of marital life.[5] Women in particular are depicted as full of anxious concern for the fulfilment of this aspect of marriage. Hence the worries of the ageing wife and hence the abhorrence of polygyny. This image of marriage and womanhood was

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1 *Infra*, 231.

2 *Infra*, 129f ; Raghunandana, *Prayachitta-tattva*, edited by Nilkamal Vidyanidhi (Calcutta, B.S. 1334), 380.

3 *Chandi*, 8. Ruparama, *Dharmamangala*, 109-110, 120-21.

4 *Raghu*, *Ahnikatattvam*, *daropagamanavidhi*, 166.

5 *Chandi*, 35, 53, 147, 148 etc.; Ruparama Chakravarti, *Dharmamangala*, 109-10, 120-21.

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not even at variance with the prevailing system of values which was at most neutral in relation to it.

In terms of practice, this attitude to sex implied a certain tolerance of masculine self-indulgence. The wife evidently lived in the fear of the husband developing extra-marital interests or contracting a second marriage.[1] Neither act was socially condemned unless it involved the violation of any ritual taboo. To stabilise the husband's affections was a major purpose of the elaborate paraphernalia of charms and magical objects,—[2] a psychological defence mechanism for women in a situation of continual insecurity. To the woman, the image of the good life consisted in the monogamous family free from all possible rivals in her sexual life. Deviations from this pattern were psychologically unacceptable to her, though not morally condemnable.

As indicated above, in a male-dominated society, the attitude to sexual morality was not symmetrical for men and women. The institution of child marriage may have served several functions in the Indian social context and was no doubt linked to the system of beliefs regarding the householder's *dharma* and the duty to one's manes. Its links with the prevailing norms of sexual morality for women were, however, clearly recognised.[3] To leave one's husband's home, however intolerable the conditions, was the ultimate of social disgrace.[4] Widowhood entailed total celibacy and as such was recognised as an intolerable curse. Women had to be particularly careful to maintain a reputation for absolute chastity. Suspicion could be provoked by the flimsiest circumstances. If the chastity of a married woman ever became suspect, the ritual status of her husband's family suffered seriously and fellow caste men would exclude it from the circle of commensality and, presumably, connubium. The onus of removing the suspicion was on the

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[1] *Chandi*, 76-77f.

[2] *Infra*, 173; *Chandi*, 151.

[3] *Chandi*. 143: "*nar dekhi abhirām, yadi kanya kare kām, pāy pitā narak-yantraṇā!*" (Translation: "If the (unmarried) daughter feels the stirrings of desire on seeing a handsome man, the father will suffer in hell").

[4] *Ibid.*, 79.

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woman and the relevant actions might have actually included going through such ordeals as are described in the contemporary literature.[1] The infiltration of Tantric orgiastic practices into genteel households and the relative flexibility of sexual norms among sects like the *sahajiyas* may have modified these norms and practices, but one does not know to what extent.[2]

The norms of relationship between husband and wife differed significantly from the patterns of expectations and actual behaviour. Ideally, the husband was an incarnation of Narayana, the most coveted "ornament" for women, above all criticism. The wife who burnt herself on the husband's funeral pyre brought glory to her father's family as well as to the family she had married into.[3] The pattern of expectation reflected in the literary conventions and the magical rituals associated with marriage do not, however, fit in with such values. The charms were meant to 'domesticate' the husband, who, ideally, should remain silent like a dead cow's head when the wife abused him.[4] In short, the husband's subjection to his wife was sought to be as complete as possible. The asymmetrical norms of sexual morality for men and women and male domination of society were apparently sought to be compensated by the resort to magical formulas, an action expressing the women's keenness to contain their menfolk's extra-marital or polygynous proclivities not condemned by society and to ensure domestic harmony on their own terms. *Sastric* injunctions notwithstanding, wives were pictured as estimating the worth of their husbands in terms of their ability as providers and bed-companions.[5] In domestic life, male domination surely had not reached a point where the husband could take his wife for granted. A man going to take a second wife is depicted as anxious to soothe his first wife's feelings; a husband too poor

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1 *Ibid.*, 221, 224.

2 *Infra*, 157; *Sarvollasatantra*, D.C. Bhattacharya's Introduction, 23.

3 *Chandi*, 31, 52, 78.

4 *Supra*, p. 10, f. n. 2.

5 One of the set pieces in the *panchalis* is the "*Nārīgaṇer pāti-nindā*" ("The Wives Malign Their Husbands") wherein the women of the neighbourhood contrast their husbands' various failings with the hero's manifold excellence. One comes across a mild admonition for such 'unvirtuous' conduct only very rarely. See *Chandi*, 31.

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to provide for the family puts up with his wife's stream of abuses.[1]

The institution of "second marriage" celebrated on the occasion of the child-wife attaining puberty continued in our period. Its functional significance,—viz. postponement of sexual relationship until the bride's childhood was over,—appears to have receded into the background. The literary conventions of the period, depicting consummation immediately after marriage, and, specifically, before the *pushpotsava*, celebrating a girl's attainment of puberty, suggest no awareness of the need for such postponement.[2] In contrast, while girl-children were betrothed in the Muslim society at a very early age, the actual marriage and consummation did not take place until they had attained the age of puberty.[3] The probable abandonment of a biologically healthy practice by the upper caste Hindus may perhaps be explained with reference to the norms which required absolute chastity of women without imposing any corresponding restrictions on men.

As already noted, the institution of marriage in mediaeval Bengal had reference to a social context much wider than that of the immediate family and was evidently an instrument of inter-group cohesion. In many societies, this aspect of cohesion is often reflected in the relationship with the in-laws who belong to a different group and as such are strangers with whom there are potentialities of hostility. Cohesion may be achieved by over-compensating this potentiality with excessive deference on part of the son-in-law and similarly institutionalised consideration shown by the father-in-law. Mediaeval Bengali literature is full of references to this institutionalised relationship and to extreme sensitiveness to breach of form in this regard.[4] The potentiality of hostility is clearly recognised.[5] The mother-in-law with whom the son-in-law had a typical

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[1] *Chandi*, 147, 37-38.

[2] *Ibid.*, 213: The child bride, Khullana, is described as having attained her puberty after she had been cohabiting for four months.

[3] *Infra*, 230.

[4] *Chandi*, 13: "*Svasur yeman tāta*" (Translation: "One's father-in-law is like one's father") Also 144.

[5] *Ibid.*, 13: "*Jāmātā svasure dvanda āchhe chirakāl*" (Translation: "There is always a conflict between the father-in-law and the son-in-law.")

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avoidance relationship, went through symbolic propitiatory gestures like pouring *dadhi* (yoghurt) on the bridegroom's feet on the wedding day. The potential inter-group hostility which the marital relationship was expected to eliminate was further symbolically expressed in mock-fights between the bridegroom's party and the bride's family which could take a serious turn.[1] Joking relationship with the in-laws of one's own generation helped modify the negative potentialities. The maintenance of certain forms including excessive attention and symbolically deferential acts was however always expected from the affines. Denial of such treatment to a man betokened his utter worthlessness in the eyes of society.[2]

The typical family unit we encounter in the contemporary literature is a relatively small one consisting of husband, wife and children, at times, the old parents who are usually pictured as living in the grown up son's home as respected guests rather than as the heads of the household.[3] The son's filial duty of looking after the aged parents was considered socially obligatory, but deviations from this norm were apparently not unknown.[4] In the 'ideal' family the daughter-in-law was an object of affection to the mother-in-law, but the familiar figure of the Bengali housewife pestered by the husband's mother and sister is by no means absent from the contemporary literature.

The birth of a son who would inherit status and property was a cherished object of family life and a man might go in for a second marriage if the first failed to fulfil this wish.[5] The birth of a daughter was, however, not considered a curse as in a later

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1 *Ibid.*, 152.

2 *Ibid.*, 3: "*lakshmī-chhāḍā purush kutumba-bāḍi yāy, thākuk āsan-jal sambhāsh nā pāy !*" (Translation: "When a worthless man goes to his in-laws' house, he is not even greeted and, of course, not offered any seat or water.") Also see *Dharmamangala,* 56, 68 for joking relationship with in-laws of one's own generation.

3 *Infra,* 216. For an instance of a joint-family and of tension among its members, see Ruparama's autobiographical sketch, *Dharmamangala,* 18.

4 *Chandi,* 144: "*Karjanār Hari Dān, nāhi poshe bāpmā, prabhāte nā kari tār nām !*" (Translation: "Hari Dan of Karjana does not provide for his parents. We do not take his name in the morning".)

5 *Ibid.*, 53.

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period, partly because the institution of bride-money,[1]—though increasingly considered not altogether laudable,—had not yet been replaced by the system of dowry. The daughter, however, was a source of anxiety, because she had to be married off by a certain age. Once married, she belonged to a different social group and hence the parents' relations with her were modulated by the institutionalised relationships characteristic of inter-group contacts. There was at least some inhibition about her going uninvited to the parents' house on a social occasion.[2] The mother's attitude to the daughter was marked by a very special attachment, natural in an age when the child bride had to leave the parental home. There was, however, a material source of conflict in the preferential treatment of the son,—especially in matters of inheritance. Such conflict was often aggravated by the custom of giving dowry,—in cash or in land,—to the son-in-law which could rouse expectations and create bitterness.[3] Such conflicts are portrayed as having been particularly acute in uxorilocal households,—where the husband came to stay in the wife's parental home,—an institution permitted but looked down upon according to the prevalent social norms.[4]

A striking feature of the social values of the period consisted in the great importance attached to the kinship group, to which every individual had to show due deference. The correctness of one's conduct, in terms of ritual requirements and otherwise, was apparently judged first by the kinship group who exercised the right to outcaste a person, though perhaps not without some reference to a higher level of authority like the local *raja*. Besides one's blood relations, real or putative, ties of relationship with one's fellow villagers,

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[1] An opposite view is stated in the text of this volume (*Infra*, 215: " . . . the birth of daughters was deplored . . ."). On re-reading the relevant passages (e.g., *Chandi*, 52), I get the impression that marrying off one's daughters was considered something to worry about; besides, parents who had only daughters and no sons considered themselves unfortunate. The birth of a daughter was not considered deplorable in itself. For bride-money, see *Chandi*, 144.

[2] *Ibid.*, 14.

[3] *Ibid.*, 35-36, *infra*, 216.

[4] *Supra*, f. n. 3.

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even those of a different community, were also recognised. Such a relationship,—couched in kinship terms like brother, uncle, grandfather,—could be of equality or deference depending on the age and generation of the individuals concerned.[1]

The similarity between mediaeval Bengali Hindu society and its modern counterpart can be misleading beyond a point. With fundamental changes in the political organisation and the economic system, the upper strata of Hindu society have found important new bases for social cohesion, though the old ones have not been abandoned. Attitudes and institutions inherited from the past no longer serve quite the same purpose as in the bygone days and may have even become dysfunctional. The systems of marriage and family and the associated attitudes discussed above have to be understood in the context of a status society in which the individual was primarily subject to institutional arrangements very different from the market forces and an impersonal system of government which now powerfully influence his life. To give one specific instance, the worth of a *kula* from the point of view of matrimonial connection, was assessed in our period mainly from the view-point of ritual purity, supplemented by secular considerations like its general prestige in the eyes of society. For many decades now, in Bengali upper caste society, such considerations of ritual purity of family history have lost in priority to those of a purely secular character. The worth of the immediate rather than the extended family and the secular achievements of the bride-groom-to-be have become major determinants of choice, though the relevant regulations concerning caste, *gotra* etc. are seldom violated.

IV

Institutions and values associated with the caste system as we have seen above influenced such fundamental human associations as the family system. Any clear notion of the structure and functions of mediaeval Bengali society must hence

[1] *Chandi*, 13, 213, 224. *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, *Adi-lila*, ch. 17, mentions the episode of a conflict between a Qazi and Chaitanya in which the former eventually claimed Chaitanya as his nephew in terms of the "village relationship", adding that such relationships were superior to blood relationships. ("*deha-samvandha haite hai grām-samvandha sāncha*")

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be based on an understanding of the caste system. Unfortunately, for our period we are seriously handicapped by the paucity of source material. There are any number of caste histories, some of them authentic enough. But their one universal weakness is that of indifference to chronology. We know with some definiteness what happened before and after but I am not sure if it is legitimate to guess therefrom as to what was happening during the period under reference. From the casual references to the working of the caste system, however, it is possible to derive some broad general notions as to what it was and how it worked.

Our knowledge of the caste system in India, as it was and as it evolved in history, remains hazy and uncertain, despite a plethora of literature on the subject. We do not yet have any well-documented analysis of what the system meant to the people who lived under it and what ends it served in any particular region or period, until we come to very recent times. The theoretical and empirical studies of the system as it is now have prepared the ground for a broad consensus as to its nature and significant features. For a study of the system in any historical period, this contemporary analysis provides a useful framework of reference.

Caste is now seen essentially as a system of hierarchy, "a transitive and not cyclic order" in which "every caste is inferior to those which precede it and superior to those which follow and all are contained between two extremes."[1] This concept of hierarchy inheres in the indigenous notion of *jati* and is very different from that of social stratification which comprises arbitrary judgements such as the identification of caste with class. The hierarchy, in its turn, is based on a principle of opposition,—between the pure and the impure, co-existing in a mutual relationship of superiority and inferiority within the same system. Early in this century, the French sociologist, Célestin Bouglé identified what he considered the three distinctive but interrelated features of the cast system, [2] (1) a

[1] Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus—Essai sur le système des castes, 59.*

[2] Louis Dumont and David F. Pocock, "Commented Summary of the Ist Part of Bouglé's Essais", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, II, 1958 31-44 ; also L. Dumont, *op. cit.*, 64.

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gradation of status, (2) detailed regulations to ensure separation between the different grades and (3) division of labour resulting in a pattern of interdependence. The three features are now seen as inseparable in reality, the analytical distinction being introduced by the observer. Besides, all the three "principles" are based on the same fundamental opposition between the pure and the impure. In the status gradation it is expressed as the superiority of the pure over the impure, the separation is meant to maintain the necessary distance between the two and in the division of labour also there is an attempt to separate the pure from the impure occupations. Within the caste are further divisions and sub-divisions embodying the same basic opposition. The sub-divisions of a caste may be purely territorial in origin,[1] but whenever they are juxtaposed, there is a tendency to spell out a hierarchical ordering based on the principle of opposition discussed above.

An important element in our understanding of the caste system is the distinction between *varna* and *jati*. Max Weber made a significant contribution to this discussion in identifying the four-fold *sastric* division of Hindu society as something more than an artificial construct.[2] The groups he described as sub-caste (*jati*) are loosely accommodated within one or other of the four castes. The evidence for this fact is to be found *inter alia* in the frequent practice of commensality between the *jatis* within the same caste. In the long period, even the possibility of connubium within such 'sub-castes' was not altogether precluded. The barriers between the *varnas* in other words are much more rigid than those between the *jatis* within the same *varna*.

The customary organisation of the production and distribution of goods and services is closely linked up with the caste system.

1 For a criticism of Dumont's views and his reply, see, F.G. Bailey, "For a Sociology of India ?" *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, III, 1959, 88-101 and the "Rejoinder," *ibid.*, IV, 1960, 82-9. Also see André Beteille, "A Note on the Referrents of Caste", *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, V, 1964, 130-34 and Dumont's comments on Beteille's paper, Dumont. *op. cit.*, 67, f.n. 24.

2 Max Weber, *The Religion of India—The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale, Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1958), 55, and also Ch. I.

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In their economic dimension, the *jatis* were hereditary closed occupation groups, a fact which probably was related to deliberate or unconscious efforts to eliminate competition and ensure security of employment and income, characteristic of many traditional societies.[1] The possibility of a person moving out of his hereditary occupation and adopting some non-specialised means of livelihood was not rigidly precluded, Mobility in any opposite direction appears to have been limited. The inevitable interdependence which followed from such hereditary specialisation was institutionalized at the village level into a pattern of socio-economic relationship which has been described as *Jajmani*. At the centre of the *Jajmani* organisation stands the dominant caste,[2]— often a peasant caste,—who enjoyed politico-economic ascendancy in the village, or in a wider area. This ascendancy, according to some,[3] derives from their power over the land. All the other castes receive their income, generally on a customary basis, in cash or kind or in the form of land grants.[4] The artisan castes,—producers of goods rather than services,—enjoy relative freedom from the customary restrictions and are hence more responsive to the market forces. Among the village servants, the status of those who render services of a purely ritual character is determined on the basis of ritual consideration and only secondarily qualified by politico-economic factors. At the other end of the scale, are the land-owning and labouring castes who maintain their status by manipulating secular levers of power. The relationship between the two often has an element of heredity, but are least explicable in terms of caste values.

It is not at all certain if the above abstract picture is true of Hindu society at all times and places, especially of Bengali

1 See N.K. Basu, *Hindu Samajer Gadan* (in Bengali).

2 David F. Pocock, "Notes on *Jajmani* Relationships", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, VI, 1962, 78-95 ; M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay, 1962); "The Dominant Caste in Rampura", *American Anthropologist*, 61, 1959, 1-16.

3 Thomas O. Beidelman, *A Comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System*, (Locust Valley, N.Y., *c.* 1959).

4 Edward B. Harper, "Two Systems of Economic Exchange in Village India", *American Anthropologist*, 61, 1959, 760-78 ; also Pocock's article cited in f.n. 2 *supra*.

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Hindu society for the period under reference. There are certain indubitable facts about the caste system as it then subsisted. In the scheme of hierarchy, for instance, there are two fixed points marking the extreme limits of the system : the ritual ascendancy of the Brahmin who was treated as a god on earth and enjoyed an ascriptive status independent of his economic or social functions, and at the other end of the scale, the treatment of the *Chandala* and certain other untouchable groups as the lowest of the low.[1] In between these two extremes is an interdeterminate world of caste ranking about which our knowledge is exceedingly hazy. One gets an occasional hint of the fact that some ranking was generally accepted. It is not equally clear that this acceptance was universal, especially at the lower levels of caste hierarchy. The phenomenon described as caste mobility which generally takes the form of either an individual family trying to pass off as members of a caste higher than the one they actually belonged to[2] or that of an entire occupational caste claiming a rank in the *varna* system higher than the one conceded to them is occasionally mentioned in the contemporary literature. The likelihood of caste mobility generated by the phenomenon of mass migration also have a relevance to Bengal as much as to other parts of Mughal India.[3] The frequent depredations of the Maghs and the Portuguese, large scale abduction of women during the wars and rebellions, the regular trade in slaves captured from among the settled population, all had implications for the caste system which are not quite clear from our sources. The individuals and families affected by such calamities surely suffered from the point of view of their ritual purity. The references to *Magha-dosha* and *Firinghi-dosha* in the caste chronicles of Bengal, however, suggest that the victims of such calamities were permitted to remain within the orbit of the caste order, though

1 *Infra*, 215 ; *Chandi*, 106. *Dharmamangala*, 10 : *brāhmane govinde kichhu bhed nā karive* (Translation "Make no distinction between Brahmins and (the god) Govinda.")

2 *Chandi*, 131.

3 Leon Sinder, *Caste Instability in Mughal India* (Seoul, Korea, undated); also see my review of the book in the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, July, 1966, 294.

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not without some loss of hierarchical status.[1] As to the indeterminacy of the *varna* status of the different occupational castes in our period one can only say that the precise limits of the Vaisya or Sudra *varnas* are not clear from our sources though these terms occur frequently enough in them and hence have a certain relevance for our understanding of the contemporary image of the caste system.

The aspect of hierarchical ranking which concerned and affected the lives of men most directly referred to the precise ranking of a family,—and of an individual primarily as a member of a family,—within a *jati*. The relevant criteria are spelt out fairly clearly in the contemporary sources. The notion of relative purity or impurity was basic in this context. Purity of family history and of one's personal conduct in terms of well-defined norms was the decisive factor in determining one's status ranking. Certain norms had a universal relevance, others referred to individual *jatis* or *varnas*. Again, they could be purely ritualistic, or be linked to secular values. Certain norms reveal a combination of the two principles. The distinction between the ritual and the secular was however alien to the mediaeval mind : to it all conduct was either pure (*suddha*) or impure.

Whatever one's *jati*, one's status rank within it depended above all on the ritual purity of one's *kula*—in terms of the strict observance of the laws relating to connubium, commensality and taboos. In so far as these laws were the same for all *varnas* and *jatis*—and, to a large extent they were so,—here was a universally applicable criterion for determining ritual status. Avoidance of connubium and commensality with persons outside one's *jati*, especially those belonging to the lower rungs of the hierarchy, was a principle binding on at least all Hindus of the upper castes. A family avoiding connubium with all below itself in ritual ranking even within

[1] *Infra*, 68, 83 ; *Baharistan*, 146vo—147vo, 219vo etc. ; *ibid*, translation, I, 273-76 ; II, 476. *Magha-dosha* and *Feringhi-dosha* are the technical names for ritual impurity, not amounting to loss of caste, caused by pollution through 'contact' with the Maghs and the Portuguese. Also see R.C. Majumdar (ed.), *Bangla Desher Itihas*, Vol. 2, (Calcutta, B.S. 1373) 307.

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its own caste,[1] had claims to the highest status. A wide range of taboos was also binding on all upper caste Hindus. Certain items of diet were totally tabooed, others were ritually prescribed on some days of the month.[2]

The rules regarding ritual purity and impurity differed from caste to caste at least at two distinct levels. First, for the same offence against ritually correct conduct,—cowslaughter for example,—Raghunandana, following earlier *smritis*, prescribes penances which increase in rigour as one goes down the caste ladder. The rigour of the penance is also greater if the owner of the cow is a member of the upper castes, and greatest, if he is a Brahmin.[3] To give another instance, the merit attached to gift-giving varied according to the caste of the donee.[4] In other words, certain demands of ritually correct conduct might be basically the same for all, but differ in degree from caste to caste. One does not know how far these precepts were in fact followed in practice. If they were, it would mean that cleansing oneself of ritual impurity was a more arduous task for the people belonging to the lower castes than, say, for the Brahmins. Since penance often involved substantial expenditure, one could hope to maintain one's ritual status in cases of departures from the norm only if one were sufficiently wealthy. Secondly, certain demands of ritual purity varied from caste to caste not only in degree but also in kind. To give one extreme example, injury to living beings was legitimate (*vaidhahimsa*) for Brahmins only in specified circumstances ; to a person of the hunter castes such restrictions hardly applied.[5] The life-styles of the different castes differed in many ways. Such differences had ritual as well as secular dimensions. The *Ahnikatattvam* in Raghunandana's *Smriti* detailing the ritual duties of the twice-born from early morning to night suggests a regime of extreme rigour emphasizing in particular the requirements of ritual cleanliness.[6] Presumably, a Brahmin

1 *Chandi*, 101, 144, 221.

2 *Raghu, Tithi-tattvam*, 10-11.

3 *Ibid., Prayaschitta-tattvam*, 185ff.

4 *Ibid.*, 172.

5 *Ibid., Tithi-tattvam, durgotsavah, vaidhahimsā-vichārah*, 33-4 ; *Chandi*, 71.

6 *Ibid., Ahnikatattvam*, especially 121-27.

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could deviate from the recommended code of behaviour only at grave risks to his ritual status. In some ways, the demands of ritual cleanliness were not as clearly defined for the non-Brahmin upper castes as they were for the Brahmins. The *Chandimangala* relates the story of an intra-caste dispute for precedence among *Gandha Vaniks*, in which an individual's claim to high ritual status is challenged on the ground that his father, who sold rings to courtesans and at times had to touch them, would take his meals afterwards without first having a bath. The accusation was answered with the plea that actions in pursuit of business legitimate for one's *jati* involved no ritual impurity.[1] Except in connection with purificatory penances, the demands of ritual purity appear to have diminished in rigour as one moved down the caste ladder. The exhaustive and highly demanding regulations of Raghunandana's *ahnikatattvam* refer chiefly to the daily duties of the Brahmin. At the other end of the scale, the daily ritual duties of the Sudra are summarily discussed in the briefest section of his *opus*[2] which repeats the ancient law excluding the Sudra from Vedic *mantras*, allows him to use the Puranic *mantras* only and that by proxy through a Brahmin priest and reiterates the view that for him the giving of gifts is the chief meritorious act.

As indicated above, the norms of sexual morality for women could have important implications for the ritual status of any family belonging to the upper castes. The relationship between such norms and the magical-mystical beliefs at the root of the system of rituals is not obvious in our period, though in all probability the emphasis on the chastity of women was associated not merely with male domination of society, but also with a faith in the supra-natural powers which chastity was supposed to confer. The other side of this belief,—viz., that sexual immorality on the part of the womenfolk provokes the occult forces of misfortune,—which persists even now may also have contributed to the general acceptance of this norm.

In short, the past and present conduct of the womenfolk in one's *kula* was a determinant of one's position in the hierarchy for reasons derived partly from the secular norms of mediaeval

1 *Chandi*, 221.
2 Raghu, *Sudrahnikāchāra-tattvam*, 407.

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Bengali society, partly from the notions of ritual purity, the secular norms themselves being based to some extent on magical-mystical beliefs. Judged by this criterion, a person could be excluded from the circle of commensality if his wife was believed to be unchaste.[1] A person with many widows in his family also suffered loss of status[2], presumably because widowhood implied possibilities of unchaste conduct, besides indicating that the family was not favoured by fortune.

The secular norms determining one's rank within one's caste,—for such specific purposes as eligibility for marriage alliances or deciding the order of precedence on social occasions,—were, by and large, the same for all castes. Two facts, however, need to be emphasized. With some exceptions discussed below, even the secular criteria referred to one's rank within the caste : one's position in the social hierarchy vis-á-vis members of other castes was, generally speaking, fixed regardless of all such considerations on the basis of the prevailing order of precedence among the castes. Secondly, the secular criteria, like the norms of ritual purity, referred not only to the individual but to the *kula* as well, its past history included.

One's rank in the intra-caste hierarchy depended on the fourfold criteria—"*dhana-māna-kula-śīla*" (wealth, prestige, family, conduct). Wealth and prestige based on secular power or achievements were thus by no means irrelevant to one's status. The view that even the wealthy and the politically powerful could not take liberties with the requirements of ritual purity without loss of status is however strongly emphasized in our sources. So far as the non-ritual aspect of "sila" or right conduct was concerned, the relevant judgments reflected the contemporary notions of ethics and the good life. It has often been suggested that the caste system with its emphasis on the specific and different duties for the different castes precluded any universally valid system of ethics. I have failed to trace in our sources much evidence in support of this view. True, in relation to certain castes certain actions were specified as objectionable. Generally, however, such taboos were no more than particular applications of a general ethic. Honest

1 *Chandi*, 222.
2 *Ibid.*, 221.

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straight-forward conduct was expected of all.[1] A trader who cheated suffered loss of status in accordance with this general principle.[2] All were expected to live up to the life-style appropriate to their caste and occupation. Hence an illiterate Brahmin was looked down upon.[3] Actions generally condemned on ethical grounds, such as those involving injury to life, were permitted to certain castes in view of their occupation. One can reasonably argue that such exceptions were attempts at practical adjustment and did not imply any negation of a generally valid ethical system. So far as one can see, the requirements of ritual purity varied from caste to caste much more than the demands of morality.[4]

In another important respect, there was a clear departure from the pattern of universality. Right conduct was not merely an ethical question but a matter of life-styles, and here a clear distinction between the upper and the lower castes was recognized. Our sources clearly suggest an ideal of conduct expected of the upper castes in general. In its essence it was the Brahminical ideal, only somewhat more generalized and shorn of the expectations associated specially with the sacerdotal caste. The concept of *sila* or right conduct for the upper castes consisted in an emphasis on righteousness, humility, generosity, self-restraint, love of scholarship, knowledge of the scriptures, and respect for the gods, Brahmins and the *guru*. The image of the lower castes on the other hand was associated with uncouthness, with unrestrained anger which would be exceedingly unseemly in anyone belonging to the upper strata of the caste order.[5]

Life-styles, of course, were not determined exclusively by the caste one belonged to, but depended to a substantial extent on

[1] *Raghu*, 129. For a discussion of the view that there was no universally valid ethical system, see Weber, *op. cit.*, 144; also I. Karve, *Hindu Society—An Interpretation*, 9, Ch. III.

[2] *Chandi*, 144.

[3] *Ibid.*, 104.

[4] There are instances of certain actions not being permissible to members of certain castes. For instance, a *Gandha Vanik* renting out houses suffered loss of status (*Chandi*, 144). The secular or ritual basis for the taboo is not obvious.

[5] *Chandi*, 23, 61, 79, 144, 221.

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the actual occupation. A Brahmin Zamindar adopted to the best of his ability a kingly style of life, sporting all the trappings of royalty.[1] Conformity to this royal image was evidently essential to the maintenance of his status. A Brahmin official or cultivator would obviously have a very different life-style, though all three lived by the same code of rituals and morality. One's occupation was an important determinant of one's status within the caste : the Brahmin scholar was highly respected individual, the illiterate priest was not.[2]

Despite the disdain for the lower castes reflected in our sources, neither the good life nor the heroic ideal was by any means the monopoly of the upper or even the ritually pure castes. The tribal and folk basis of Bengal's cultural tradition and the numerous obscure cults which developed in Bengal at the periphery of orthodox Brahminism permitted the idolization of a trader, a hunter or a person of some very low caste. A new heroic ideal in terms of the excellence of one's devotion to Krishna was introduced by the Vaishnavas. It permitted the elevation of a low caste devotee to the status of a saint adorable even by Brahmins.[3]

There were other factors disturbing the inter-caste order of precedence. Secular criteria like wealth, power and occupation were important determinants of inter-caste as much as intra-caste status ranking. The evidence of silence suggests that wealth contributed relatively little to this distortion except indirectly as a means to power. But power was crucial to social ranking in a way which must have upset the orderly arrangements of the caste system. In our sources, the semi-autonomous *zamindar* is a *raja*, a king,—the apex of the social pyramid, whatever his caste. Since a worshipful attitude to Brahmins was an accepted ideal of kingly virtue, presumably a Kayastha *raja* like Pratapaditya being in power implied no threat to the ascendancy of Brahmins in the caste hierarchy. It seems

1 *Ibid.*, 8.
2 *Supra*, 24, f.n. 3.
3 *Infra*, 137-38 ; *Dharmamangala*, 13 : *Vaishṇav hay yadi jālīye yavan, yuge yuge hai tār dāsīr nandan.*

(Translation : "If a Vaishnava is even Muslim by origin, I would feign be his slave-woman's son in every age.")

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extremely unlikely however that a powerful *bhuiyan* permitted any non-Brahmin to be honoured as his superior in any sense, whatever the generally accepted caste order of precedence. What was true of the *raja*, was probably also true with appropriate qualifications, of the high officials and, at a lower level, even of the village headman. The latter's power and claims to precedence are recognisable in our sources, and there is nothing to indicate that they had to belong to any particular group of castes.[1]

An important fact concerning the hierarchy of occupations at its lower levels is the extensive prevalence of the institution of slavery in our period.[2] We do not, however, know how it affected the caste order of precedence. Presumably, capture by and commensality with the ritually impure non-Hindus implied "loss of caste", if not conversion to Christianity or Islam, though the references to *Magha-dosha* and *Firinghi-dosha* suggest that this was not necessarily so. What, however, was the fate of peasants and artisans reduced to slavery by a Hindu *Zamindar* ? One wonders if they did not suffer a loss of status perhaps without any corresponding movement down the caste ladder.

An analysis of the factors determining status hierarchy in mediaeval Bengal reveals a predominantly ascriptive society where one's material expectations were primarily defined by the accident of birth. Ascription, however, was not exclusively dependent on ritual status or even on caste, for the status which one inherited from one's family was subject to other determinants as well. Moreover, achievement had its role in widening the limits of an individual's prospects in life,—in terms not only of wealth and power but also of status which power invariably conferred. And the frequent changes in the level of peace and security introduced an element of instability in the time-honoured order of precedence.

It would, however, be a serious mistake to underplay the

[1] *Chandi,* 100, 108. For the relative irrelevance of wealth to status, see *ibid.*, 88 : *nīch kabhu uchcha hay pāile vahu dhan?*
(Translation. "Does a low (caste) person become high (caste), by becoming wealthy ?")

[2] *Infra,* 68, 113-14, 196-97.

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contemporary preoccupation with the caste system in any account of mediaeval Bengali society. The social world to the mediaeval Bengali Hindu was a world of castes or *jatis*. To the Vaishnava, dreaming of a millennium in which the world would be flooded by *Krishna-prema* (love-devotion for Krishna), the relevant point of reference was mankind consisting of all castes, "down to the *Chandāla*" (*achandāl jan*)[1]. The Tantric *kulacharin* who rejected all bonds of social convention took his female partner for esoteric practices from among certain specified low castes, thus accepting the basic assumptions of the system in the very act of rejecting them.[2] Mukundarama described the foundation of an imaginary city in terms of the various *jātis* who came and settled in their respective quarters.[3] Nearly all characters, fictional or real, are identified with reference to their *jāti* in the contemporary literature. In both the image and the reality of social relationships, caste consciousness was an omnipresent and all pervasive element.

In the Hindu view of society, even the Muslims were not excluded from the caste order. Mukundarama's account of the various *jātis* coming to settle in the city of Gujarat begins with the description of the Muslims.[4] Inclusion into the caste order, in theory as much as in practice, implied the fixation of rank in a hierarchy of precedence. Our sources reveal a certain ambivalence so far as the hierarchical status of Muslims in the Hindu image of society was concerned. Raghunandana unequivocally bracketed Muslims with the lowest of the untouchables.[5] In the Vaishnava literature they were mentioned as objects of aversion and hostility who, however, were not excluded from the possibility of redemption and, hence, of conversion.[6] In the *Chandimangala*—which probably represents a non-denominational, "common man's" point of view—one comes across a very different attitude. The Muslims there are a *jāti*, with a distinct way of life, worthy of respect.[7] Only

1 *Infra*, 137, 151 ; *Chaitanyacharitāmrita*, 72, 244, 288 ; *Premavilāsa*, 116, 171.
2 *Infra*, 167-68.
3 *Chandi*, 102-107.
4 *Ibid.*, 102.
5 *Raghu*, *Prāyaschittatattvam*, 193.
6 *Infra*, 133, 151.
7 *Supra*, f. n. 4.

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the butcher selling beef provokes a pejorative phrase. The community of Muslims is then seen as divided into sub-groups, again described as *jātis*, most, but not all of which represented distinct occupations. The fact that Mukundarama described the Muslim "castes" first, even before he described the Brahmins (in his account the *varnas* followed one another in order of precedence),—suggests an emphasis on separation between the two communities, rather than an unequivocal feeling of superiority based on ritual and other criteria. It is significant that in the list of inferior *jātis* (*itar jāti*), tribal peoples like the Kirats and Kols are mentioned, alongside the Hindu untouchable castes. Neither the Muslim community as a whole, nor any Muslim *jāti* appears in this list. In the image of a social order composed of *jātis*, the Muslims apparently represented a distinct order of their own parallel to and co-existing with the Hindu hierarchy of castes. In the relatively simple schematisation of the *smritis*, where the Brahminical caste society is the only framework of reference, they are unhesitatingly placed at the bottom of the ladder on grounds of ritual impurity. In the real world where the upper strata of the Muslim community represented political power and the lower strata largely consisted of artisan groups producing essential goods and services, this schematisation appears to have been valid only so far as it precluded commensality in the very narrow sense of partaking food and water touched by another. Not only did the Hindu power *élite*,—both 'feudal' and bureaucratic,—have intimate social intercourse with the Muslims, in many details of their life-habits they consciously imitated the Muslim aristocracy.[1]

The Hindu belief that the Muslim community also was divided into 'castes' had an empirical basis : the criteria for the division of the Muslim society into distinct groups were however multiple. Race, for one thing, was an important factor,—Mughals and Pathans in particular preserving their distinct identities. Cutting across the racial barrier was the distinction between Saiyads and the rest. The various Pathan clans (*khels*) are also mentioned as *jātis* by Mukundarama. At the lower level of the social hierarchy was the various artisan

[1] *Infra*, 220-21.

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and professional groups each with a distinctive 'caste' name.[1] It would however be a mistake to equate Muslim 'casteism' with its Hindu counterpart. There is nothing to indicate that intercaste commensality or even connubium was precluded. Despite the preoccupation of the Muslim upper classes with the question of precedence,[2] we have no hint of an institutionalised order of precedence as between the Muslim castes. Surely, ritual purity was not the basis of caste precedence so far as the Muslims were concerned.

Weber suggested that the Muslim castes were essentially status groups. Conceivably in Bengal in our period the various racial and descent groups (like the Saiyads) maintained a certain degree of separateness, the Muslims of foreign origin looked down upon the local converts and each foreign racial group laid claims to superior status in relation to others. It is very doubtful, however, if any order of precedence among the various groups was generally accepted, except for the superiority of the Saiyads universally conceded among the Muslims. In the nineteenth century and after, a broad status division in the Indian Muslim society between the *Ashraf* and *Ajlaf*,[3] the gentry and the common people, was widely prevalent. It is probable that such a division,—roughly similar to the one between the Hindu high and low castes,—was recognised among Muslims in mediaeval Bengal. The bickerings over status mentioned repeatedly in the *Baharistan* are, however, based on individual rather than family or group claims. Since these refer mainly to the Mughal officials, the relevance of the information to the Muslim society in general is somewhat uncertain. To a considerable extent, claims to status were based on and expressed through life-styles. Conspicuous consumption on a competitive scale and an elaboration of formal etiquette were among the chief levers manipulated to attain and assert status.

If there was a hierarchical ordering of the Muslim profes-

1 *Infra*, 225f.

2 *Infra*, 84.

3 Pradip Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal—Aspects of Social History*, (Calcutta 1965), 50-57 ; Imtiaz Ahmed, "The Difference between Ashrafs and Ajlafs in Indian Muslim Society," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. III, No. 3.

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sional and artisan *jātis*, we have no information bearing on this point. Like the Hindu occupational castes, these were hereditary groups. We do not, however, know how far they represented closed occupations, nor, whether, a member of such a *jāti*, retained,—like his Hindu counterpart,—his caste identity even when he followed some other occupation.

Caste according to one view, as we have seen, is primarily an economic institution,—a hereditary system of division of labour which helped contain the forces of competition in a world of stagnant and undeveloped markets and thus provided some security of employment and income. Besides, it is generally agreed that the system had economic dimensions,—whatever its "essential" character might have been. In fact the customary arrangements for production and distribution in India's pre-market economy are seen as having been dovetailed with caste in its economic aspects.[1]

In our sources, all occupations involving specialised skills, both of a ritual and a non-ritual character, are associated with some particular *jāti* or other. Where a *jāti* is coterminous with a *varna*. e.g., the Brahmins, it is associated with a group of occupations rather than a single occupation. In the case of the Brahmins, the specialised occupations ranged from pursuit of scholarship to the work of the marriage-broker. There was however a wide range of unspecialised occupations, important from the point of view of production and the power structure,—which were in no sense closed. The raja or the *zamindar*, the *taluqdar* or the Hindu officials in the local courts and in the employ of the *jagirdars* did not have to belong to any particular caste. The *Ain's* reference to *zamindars* of three castes in Bengal is almost certainly a numerical understatement. Even more important, while our sources mention agricultural castes, the occupations of agriculture and landless labour were evidently followed by people drawn from a variety of castes,

[1] See F.G. Bailey, *Caste and the Economic Frontier. A village in Highland Orissa* (Manchester University Press, 1957); Mckim Marriott (ed). *Village India. Studies in the Little Community* (Chicago, 1955); G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India* (Bombay, 1950)

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Brahmins not excluded.[1] Membership of a particular *jati* thus did not necessarily imply the pursuit of a particular occupation. Were the specialised occupations closed to all but the members of the appropriate castes? The factors of instability in the caste system discussed above[2] indicate the likely loopholes through which one might move into one of these occupations without being born into it. Considerations of status as well as profit might have provided the required inducement. We know of the increasing export of sugar and textiles from Bengal in the latter half of the seventeenth century, leading almost certainly to an increase in output at least in some centres of production. It would be a matter for surprise if the production of these commodities continued to be undertaken exclusively by the members of the appropriate castes, especially since much of the relevant skill could be easily acquired.[3]

The caste basis of rural economic organisation,—the *Jajmani* system in one form or another,—has persisted in many parts of India down to modern times. At least some aspects of this system are traceable in our sources. Many of the lower as well as upper castes producing goods and services essential for the rural economy are mentioned as enjoying *inam* lands,—presumably as gifts from the local *zamindar* or *taluqdar*,[4] a practice which has its parallel in one form of the *Jajmani* system.[5] Beyond this meagre information we have very little to go upon. Several possibilities are, however, suggested indirectly by the other evidence bearing on the rural economy. The service castes enjoying *inam* lands were, apparently, not precluded from

1 Poet Mukundarama's autobiographical sketch in the *Chandimangala* clearly mentions that his hereditary occupation was agriculture *(Chandi*, 6: "*damunyāy kari krshi* (alt.reading, *chāsh chashi*), *nivās purush chhay sāt*" Tr. ("I followed the occupation of agriculture at Damunya, where we were settled for six to seven generations.") There is nothing to suggest that reference is to rental income from agriculture. Raghunandana in the *Ahnikatattvam*, p. 128, quoting Brihaspati and Gautama, explains the circumstances under which a Brahmin may follow the occupations of agriculture, trade and money-lending.

2 *Supra*. p. 19, f.n. 3.

3 I have, however, failed to trace any direct evidence for such movement into specialized caste occupations.

4 *Chandi*, 43, 104, 105, 107.

5 E.B. Harper, *Loc. cit.*

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exchange activities. The *Vaidya*, for instance, is specifically mentioned as enjoying *inam* land and at the same time charging fees for his professional services.[1] Similarly the Brahmin priest received payments in cash and kind, not on any fixed customary basis, in addition to his hereditary land grant.[2] The upper strata of the service castes and religious grantees almost certainly received a share of the produce from their lands and were not in any way directly involved in agricultural production. The Kayasthas are referred to as a rentier group in *Chandimangala*. More important for our understanding of the rural economy, we do not encounter in our sources any dominant peasant caste nor any communal control over land. Such negative evidence is of course not conclusive. The almost invariable association of *zamindars* and *taluqdars* with the land grants to the service and artisan castes however suggests that such 'donors', rather than any dominant peasantry, were the chief *Jajmans*. It was they who mediated the distribution of rural income, so far as the non-agricultural castes were concerned,—through the system of land-grants. Such castes supplemented their income with exchange transactions on cash or barter terms, which meant that the economic relationship between the agriculturists and other occupations were at least partly determined by the market.[3]

Subsistence production, based on customary arrangements, does not in fact appear to have been the chief characteristic of Bengal's economy in our period. The economic world, as reflected in the contemporary literature, is predominantly one of exchange and cash transactions. Agriculture extensively depended on supply of credit from outside sources, often the *zamindar* himself.[4] A situation of economic distress was typically one in which there was no buyer for cattle and grain.[5] Land, the basic means of production, was alienable and actually alienated in return for cash value. Raghunandana in his chapter on inheritance (*dāyatattvam*) discusses what is permissible in

1 *Chandi*, 105.
2 *Ibid.*, 104
3 *Infra*, 201f.
4 *Infra*, 201.
5 *Chandi*, 7 : "*dhānya garu keha nāhi kine*" (Translation : "No one was buying paddy and cows")

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connection with the sale and mortgage of immovable property, including land.[1] Many of the daily articles of consumption even at the village level were purchased for cash. The pedlars dealt in a wide range of commodities and the village artisans themselves sold their goods.[2] The production of handicraft manufactures and even the by-employment of spinning in agricultural households were at least partly dependent on advance given by the merchant money-lenders.[3]

The growth of the urban markets, not to mention the overseas markets which underwent remarkable expansion later in the seventeeth century provided further impetus to market oriented production. The substantial accumulation of liquid capital employed in commerce and evidently as capital put out to producers is further evidence of the development of a money economy. Already in our period, there was a marked tendency towards the localization of handicraft industries, especially textiles, in certain areas. Later in the seventeenth century we have evidence to show that in the Malda region the tendency had been carried so far that a particular *arang* produced only a particular variety of textiles. We do not know if this was a new development or a continuation of an earlier form of production organization.[4] We thus have evidence for the development of market phenomena at practically every level of economic activity. We do not, however, know what proportion of productive effort was oriented to exchange. In all probability, it was small. Besides, there is little evidence for the flow of commodities from the urban to the rural centres. While the towns and cities depended heavily on rural supplies, in the rural sector itself the markets appear to have been confined to small territorial units consisting of at most a few villages with hardly any tendency towards integration into larger units.

1 *Raghu*, 337-38 ; also *Vyāvahāra-tattvam*, 189 for the circumstances under which a 'land-owner' (*bhusvāmi*) suffered a lapse of his rights.

2 *Chandi*, 91-92, 139-94. Significantly, the lists of purchases mention a wide range of consumer goods, but do not include foodgrains.

3 *Chandi*, 31.

4 *Infra*, 201, 205f ; Om Prakash, "The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1650-1717" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Delhi University).

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In a pre-dominantly agrarian economy the rights in land become a major determinant of the nature of socio-economic relationship. In Mughal Bengal these rights were partly implicit in the traditional economic organisation and partly derived from the political-administrative system. The *zamindars* who were not merely revenue collecting authorities as in some other parts of India, but retained the vestiges of independent political power, appear to have been practically ubiquitous in Mughal Bengal.[1] The proportion of the produce they claimed as their share is not known. We only know that whatever the limits of their customary claim they increased their demand by levying additional cesses and a variety of imports. In their capacity as moneylender to the peasants, they could lay claims to a further share of the produce.[2] Moreover, there was always the possibility of extra cess being collected. The one institutionalized sanction against excessive demand appears to have been mass exodus, an instrument applied against the *jagirdars* and the revenue collectors representing the central authority in the *Khalisa* as well. The *jagir*, as is well known, was not a fief but a prebend.[3] Since after the Mughal conquest the lands under the *zamindars'* control were also formally conferred upon them as *jagirs*, these too were in theory prebends. In practice, however, these remained lands under the hereditary control of the *zamindars*, the extent of the control being determined by customary arrangements the precise nature of which is not quite clear. Besides *zamindaris* and *jagirs* our sources also refer to *taluqs* and if one is to believe the evidence of later tradition, these *taluqs* too were either prebends or land grants received as gifts in return for particular services without any further conditions being attached to them.[4] Whatever their origin, the *taluqdar* in our period does not appear to have been bound by any specific service obligation, though he too in all

1 *Infra*, Ch.I, Sections, VI and VIII.

2 *Chandi*, 102 : A *Zamindar* is advised to lend cattle and seedgrains to the cultivators and seize the crop when it is ready for harvesting, so that the repayment of the loan is not evaded.

3 Max Weber, *op.cit.*, 71.

4 The family histories of the *Zamindars* as recorded in the district gazetteers and district histories contain numerous references to such grants. For contemporary references to *taluqs* see *Chandi*, 6, 65.

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probability was subject to certain revenue demands from the higher political-administrative authorities. The *inam* lands and the religious grants represented a further level of rights involving a claim to a share of the produce without any necessary contribution to the process of production, though some of the holders of the *inam* lands might have become actual cultivators.

It is often stated that in the context of India's pre-colonial economy and, generally, most technologically backward societies, various levels of rights in land,—rather than ownership involving rights of alienation and hence a land-market,—are the most relevant concepts for the study of the agrarian structure. However, as already indicated, our sources refer to gift and alienation of land involving not simply a claim to a share of the produce but apparently the right of cultivation itself. When, for instance, we are told that a piece of land gifted as dowry yielded certain specified crops, the reference may well be to rentier income, but it is more likely that it is to actual rights of cultivation.[1] Again the Portuguese are known to have bought up land along both banks of the river Ganges.[2] True, there is little to indicate the existence of an extensive land-market, but that does not preclude the institution of ownership. To whom did the land belong? We only know for certain that the *zamindar* gave away *inam* lands and also that actual cultivators enjoyed the hereditary right of occupation. There is little reason to doubt that the *zamindar* exercised the right of alienation, over much of the land under his politico-administrative authority, especially unoccupied land. We do not know whether this right was vested in any other group as well. Raghunandana's references to the sale of immovable property does not, however, suggest that he had in mind only one particular social group.

The economic scene in our period does not convey an impression of stasis. Exchange which had penetrated far into the economy, is generally a dissolvent of customary arrange-

1 *Chandi*, 36 : "*jāmātāre bāp mor dilā bhumidān, tathi phale masur kāpās māsh dhān*" (Translation "My father has given his son-in-law a piece of land which produces lentils, cotton and paddy.")

2 *Infra*, 111.

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ments and relationships. The political and administrative milieu were not altogether congenial to the maintenance of *status quo*. Caste in its economic dimensions appears to have been far less of a closed system than is popularly imagined. The over-all situation thus suggests possibilities of vertical and horizontal mobility corroborated by our sources in some detail. The limitations of the process were determined by the limitations of the factors which generated it. Furthermore, there is hardly any evidence for change in the pattern of economic organisation or the forms of economic activity. Groups and individuals no doubt moved from one point to another in the network of economic relationships, but the network itself appears to have remained what it was earlier.

VI

The political system in Bengal during our period was composite in character combining within itself elements of centralization and decentralization. At some levels, political functions had become specialized activities, at others, these were still undifferentiated from the matrix of generalized social relationships.[1]

The authority vested in the village organisation must have been the predominant fact of political life for the masses of the population. Unfortunately, the political system of the village communities in mediaeval Bengal is a subject on which we have hardly any information. We merely have references to the powers claimed and perquisites enjoyed by the village headman, known as *mandal*. Authority in the specific sense of the power to decide the rights and wrongs of a man's actions and to impose sanctions accordingly, was vested partly in the caste or rather the wider kinship group, not necessarily confined to one village.[2] We do not know if there was any formal

[1] For the analytical categories on which the following discussion is based, see Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. (Translated by A.R. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. London, 1947), 139-140 ; also Aidan Southall, "A Crtique of the Typology of States and Political Systems," in *Political Systems and the Distribution of Power* (A.S.A. Monographs, London and New York, 1965).

[2] *Supra* 14-15; also *Chandi*. 222, for an instance of a caste group deciding to judge a person's conduct and take the case to the 'King' for a final decision.

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organization within the group for the discharge of this particular function. One only gets the impression that the individuals generally recognized as enjoying high status within the group were jointly invested with this authority, probably subject to the local *raja's* powers of arbitration. The Brahmin caste councils having jurisdiction over a wide area with institutionalized arrangements for the 'election' of a chief, mentioned in the eighteenth century sources, may have had their counterparts in our period, but we have no evidence on this point. Raghunandana in his chapter on expiatory rites (*Prayaschittva-tattvam*) merely states that one should consult the learned in deciding the rights and wrongs of an action and the penance appropriate to it.[1] The same chapter incidentally indicates the weakness of the relevant social organization,—caste or village council,—unbacked as it was by physical force, in imposing sanctions. Even for the highest crime in the eyes of the *smriti* writers, viz., the murder of a Brahmin, penances rather than condign punishments are prescribed. Exclusion from the circles of commensality appears to have been another common form of punishment.

At the level of the kinship group, caste or the community of villagers, the power to command or coerce,—the basis of any political system,—was not linked to any specialized function nor to any centralized authority. It was almost as undifferentiated from the other aspects of social relationship as is the authority of the father over his children from the ties which bind the members of a family together. At the level of the *raja*, *zamindar* or *taluqdar*, on the other hand, we have clear evidence of both specialization and differentiation.[2] True, the *zamindar's* authority was linked to his rights over land, but those very rights were derived from political-military power, acquired, inherited or delegated by a higher political authority. The fact that the *zamindar* did not have to belong to any particular caste signified the differentiation of their role from the more general network of social relationships nearly every aspect of which was linked to the caste system. The virtual independence of the *zamindars* in the internal administration

1 *Raghu*, 170.
2 *Supra*, p. 34, f.n. 1.

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of the territories under them,—their responsibility for the maintenance of law and order, collection of revenue, and often even administration of justice,—indicates a high degree of specialization of political functions. If the *zamindars* continued to arbitrate in social disputes, this was a function discharged by all Hindu *rajas* in their capacity as the preservers of *dharma*.

It is a standard convention in historical writings to identify local lordlings like *rajas* and *zamindars* as elements of decentralization representing the centrifugal tendencies in a political system. In the context of small-scale communities, it is, however, possible to consider them as so many focuses of centralized authority. In such contexts, political power in a given territorial unit is concentrated in the hands of the *raja* or the *zamindar* instead of being diffused through the social organism as it is in the case of the caste, the kinship group or the village community. In the *zamindar* we have the bottom level in a hierarchy of centralized authorities. For the masses of the population centralization and specialized political function appears to have been most real at this level. In our period at least, the Mughal power was something by and large outside the local system of political and social relationships.

The contemporary image of the *zamindar* distorts the realities of status and functions officially ascribed to them in a very significant way. There the *zamindar* becomes a *raja* ; even a *taluqdar* is referred to as the 'lord' (*prabhu*). The people living on a *zamindar's* land are his 'subjects' (*praja*). Descriptions of his court are couched in terms appropriate for royalty and he appears to have adopted a life-style suitable to his image. To repeat, the image is not one of a *mansabdar* of the empire, paying *peshkash* to the emperor under a special arrangement and collecting revenue from the people under his authority. Instead, it is the image of a Hindu king, devoted to the gods and the Brahmins, generous in the gift of lands, just in the distribution of punishments and rewards. In the context of the small-scale community, this was not altogether an unreal picture of the *zamindar's* actual role. In mediaeval Bengal, the *zamindars* constituted a secular aristocracy,—separated from the masses of the population by their military and political power and an appropriate life-style. It was an

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aristocracy open to the successful adventurer. Their popular image contributed to the legitimization of their authority. Their mediation may have helped to make the Mughal rule, based on the fact of conquest, all the more acceptable to the upper caste Hindu.

The Mughal rule,—with its own hierarchy of administrative authorities ranging from the emperor to the *faujdar* and *pargana* officials,—superimposed a layer of centralized authority over the inchoate, often mutually conflicting, units of local political organization. It replaced the centralized authority of the Afghan Sultans which, being physically more proximate, was more real in the consciousness of the local population. The greater efficiency and thoroughness of the Mughal bureaucratic organisation however gave it a measure of control over the people of Bengal which was almost certainly impossible in the days of the Sultans. The objects of the Mughal centralization were however such as to lead only to the forging of a few links between the imperial government and the local political system, not to any integration. Preoccupied with conquest, maintenance of their control and collection of revenue, the Mughals were only marginally involved in the detailed administration of the countryside. Outside the urban areas, the maintenance of law and order, administration of justice, the provision of necessary financial and administrative support to agricultural production remained, by and large, the responsibility of the *zamindars*. Many of the *zamindars* became *mansabdars* of the empire, but this change in office and status was more formal than real. The payment of *peshkash* signifying political submission alongside the maintenance of autonomy was a better indication of the actual state of affairs.

Except for the mediation of the local *zamindars*, the Mughal government was represented by officials who were frequently transferred, men whose social life was carefully insulated from all local contacts. To the local population, these sojourners from the world outside were mere impersonal instruments of conquest and revenue collection. Their excesses were accepted fatalistically as the consequences of one's past sins. The image of their authority was something hazy and remote. Delhi and its *Padshah* were indeed very far away in the minds of the contemporary Bengali. The *Subahdar* was a king, apparently a

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suzerain over the more familiar vassal 'kings',—the local *zamindars*. In the case of a good Hindu like Man Singh, he was idolized as a virtuous king, devoted to the deities of the Hindu pantheon. For the legitimization of the Mughal authority, however, such special pleading was hardly necessary. The right of conquest was a fully understood and accepted part of the political values of the time. Only in our period the Mughal conquest implied no more than superficial changes for the web of social relationships. This was in accordance with the limited aims of the Mughal centralization.

VII

For most aspects of the social life in mediaeval Bengal, the available data permit the reconstruction of only a very fragmentary picture. Our information is somewhat more adequate with regard to the world of beliefs and rituals. Several distinct levels of beliefs and practices co-existed within this world. At one end they represented the great intellectual traditions of formalised Hindu philosophy, cosmology and the *smritis;* at the other were their popular folk counterparts embodying the simpler, less sophisticated 'little tradition' of Hinduism as a religion of the masses.[1] The continuous interaction between the two traditions imparted a richness and vitality to the religious life of the period which had no counterparts in other spheres of social life.

The cosmological world represented in our sources is essentially that of the Puranas modified by the folk beliefs peculiar to the region.[2] There are brief references to the Vedantic notion of an impersonal deity in the writings of not only the Hindu but

1 For a discussion of the concepts of "Great Tradition" and "Little Tradition" and the interaction of the two, see Robert Redfield, *op. cit.*, Ch. III. S. B. Das Gupta, in his *Bharater Sakti-Sadhana O Sakta-Sahitya* (in Bengali, Calcutta, B.S. 1367) pp. 170-71, ascribes the power of the folk-cults in mediaeval Bengal to the decline of Brahmanism as a result of the Muslim conquest. The phenomenon seems to be explicable far more satisfactorily in terms of the interaction between the two traditions which was by no means absent in the pre-Muslim period, but merely assumed different forms. The important fact which should be emphasized, however, is the relative weakness of the "Great Tradition" in Bengal's religious life both before and after the Turkish conquest.

2 *Infra,* Ch. IV, Section *VI.*

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also the Muslim poets. But the belief in a supreme *Brahman* appears to have been mainly in the background rather than the forefront of religious thought and practices.

The worship of a large number of deities was the central feature of religion as it was commonly practiced. Some of these gods and goddesses were of local origin, some others belonged to the Puranic pantheon while a few like Varahi aud Nilamata were vestiges of the region's Buddhist Tantric past. Their origins are however rarely traceable to one single tradition.

Many of the village deities, animistic in their origin, had been adopted by the Sakta-Tantric cult and were worshipped as manifestations of Sakti,—a conceptualization of the creative principle in its feminine aspect which belonged to the very heart of the Hindu great tradition and had been conveyed to the masses through a series of Puranic myths. The snake goddess, Manasa, evidently a feature of folk-religion, was absorbed into the 'kinship group' of the great Hindu gods with the blessings of at least two Puranas.[1] The Dharma cult represented a singular admixture of crypto-Buddhism, Puranic beliefs and a distinct element of animism. Even the shrines identifiably Vaishnava or Saiva may have had local associations with the folk religion which were no longer a part of the conscious tradition in our period.

Some of the local folk deities underwent a different kind of transformation. Mangalachandi, for instance, was identified with the great Puranic goddess, Chandi, the consort of Siva. In this process of identification, however, the lofty image of Siva's consort itself was transformed into something homely and familiar,—the married daughter of a poor man's home suffering the myriad vexations of poverty. The great Mahadeva of the Hindu Trinity also becomes a mad beggar addicted to dope. The anxiety to establish personal relationship with the forces controlling one's life, a characteristic feature of folk religion, evidently influenced the image of even the highest objects of worship. The high gods are no longer merely distant denizens of snow-clad Kailash, but familiar and approachable beings even subject to the same nagging worries which cloud the lives of their worshippers.[2]

1 *Raghu*, 13, 16.

2 S.B. Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, 174, 190.

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Some of the local deities personified the malevolent phenomena in nature,—diseases for instance. Here was a characteristic expression of pre-scientific thought processes, symbolic and allusive rather than logical in their approach to the phenomenal world. Essentially such personalizations were attempts to comprehend and cope with threatening situations which became somewhat tolerable through this effort to tackle them.[1] The belief in a variety of supernatural beings—*Dakinis*, *Yoginis* etc.,—evidently expressed a similar desire to personalize the sinister forces surrounding human life so that one could hope to enter into some relationship with them. The anxiety to establish such personal relationship is pointedly expressed in the literary passages where an author describes himself as a brother to such supernatural beings.[2]

The continuous preoccupation with charms, magical objects, superstitious beliefs in the occult implication of particular happenings, the possibility of attaining supernatural powers and the long series of rituals which marked practically every stage of the Hindu's life cycle and even of his daily routine also make sense in this context.[3] The avowed objects of this inter-related body of magical formulas, charms, rituals etc. were the prevention of misfortunes like death and disease or the fulfilment of particular wishes. A close look at these objectives reveal certain central preoccupations. Many of the charms and rituals were meant to protect the life of a child, especially during the first few weeks after birth. Infant mortality must have been particularly high inducing this desperate resort to supernatural forces. Another series of charms relate to the anxiety on the part of the wife and the bride's family to ensure

1 J. Beattie, *op. cit*, Ch. 5, 12 and 13; for a detailed case study which has great relevance for the study of prescientific systems of thought and beliefs, see Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford, 1937).

2 *Chandi*, 6: "*dākinī yoginī vandon Srī dharmer pā, lubdha haiyā ye mor āsare kare ghā, tini mor bhaginī āmi tār bhāi,*" (Translation: "I bow to Dakini and Yogini as also at the feet of the august Dharma. She who (i.e., Dakini or Yogini), feeling tempted, appears in my place of assembly (for the recitation of the *Panchali*), is my sister and I am her brother.")

3 *Infra*, Ch. VI, Section 1; *Raghu, tithi-tattvam, Ahnikatattvam* and *Kritya-tattvam; infra*, 172-73.

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the steady affection of the husband and to secure domestic harmony. It is significant that the entire magical paraphernalia of *vasikarana* refer to the feminine eagerness to control their men folk and to no corresponding anxiety on part of men, a situation which derived almost certainly from the emotional insecurity in which women had to live. Many of the superstitions concerned what was auspicious and what was inauspicious and included a series of taboos on items of diet on particular days. Many events and objects outside the scope of everyday experience were considered inauspicious. The belief that the unusual portents something ominous is common enough in pre-scientific societies. At times one encounters surprising similarities even in matters of detail. For instance, the belief in the ominous implications of a bird or an animal suddenly entering the homestead, is shared by the mediaeval Bengali with several pre-industrial small-scale communities of modern times.[1]

Many of the taboos and rituals enshrined in the *smriti* literature and thus absorbed into the intellectual great tradition of Hinduism were closely linked to this belief in magic and superstition. One of the clearest examples of this fact is the proliferation of rituals connected with the early weeks in the life of a child. Many of these, significantly, have now become obsolete. The correct ritual conduct prescribed in Raghunandana's *smriti* indicates a preoccupation with the supernatural as a prime determinant of the course of human life at another level as well. There is a ritually correct way of doing almost everything,—even the most mundane acts of the daily routine. Similarly, there are ritually prescribed duties for practically every day of the year.[2] For a society not altogether deficient in empiricism so far as many practical problems were concerned, there is a remarkable dissociation of much that is ritually prescribed from any empirically experienced necessity. Why on leaving one's bed in the morning one must put one's right foot first on the ground or squat facing a particular direction while defecating[3] are questions not answerable in terms of any practical logic. The expected consequences of the

1 J. Beatties, *op. cit.*, Ch. 12; *infra*, 173.
2 *Raghu, Tithitattvam* and *Kritya-tattvam*.
3 *Ibid.*, 121, 122.

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ritually correct conduct, on the other hand, refer very much to the mundane aspects of life and only rarely to extra-terrestrial or transcendental aspirations. The giving of gifts on a particular day secures for the donor such benefits as long life, health and wealth. Chanting the name of a Puranic king on waking up leads to recovery of lost wealth.[1] True, many of the actions are guaranted to 'destroy' the consequences of one's sins. There, too, the prime object is happiness in the life hereafter,—considered a continuation of one's life on earth,—rather than the attainment of *moksha* or liberation.

These attempts to attain secular ends through ritual means are in fact an emphatic expression of the belief in the magical power of objects, actions and events. This belief was extended to the notion of time as well and the intellectual tradition of neat schematization was harnessed to spell out in great detail the auspicious and inauspicious days and hours for the performance of every action which had a ritual dimension, even if essentially mundane. The vagueness with regard to the precise divisions of time one generally encounters in pre-scientific societies was totally absent in this particular sphere of Hindu life. The incorporation of this symbolic way of thought into the Hindu great tradition was total. Every prescription in the *smriti* texts is supported with copious citations from earlier authorities,—a fact which suggests that many assumptions of the great tradition itself were not so very different from the unsophisticated beliefs of the masses.

An important aspect of Hindu religious life is the tendency towards formation of sects. Bengal in the period under discussion witnessed more than one powerful expression of this tendency. At one level these tendencies reflect a conflict between the disciplinarian and genteel values of Brahminism on the one hand and the release of pent up passions in orgiastic practices and religious emotionalism on the other.[2]

The power and influence of the Tantric beliefs and practices in mediaeval Bengal represent a significant victory of these anti-disciplinarian forces. In so far as the Tantras rejected caste practices and values at the level of esoteric practices and mystic

[1] *Ibid*, 14, 15, 121.
[2] Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, Ch. IV.

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culture, the indirect challenge implicit in the Tantric system to the very basis of Hindu social organisation was indeed very great. By the eighteenth century, Tantric esoteric practices had penetrated even the genteel upper caste households.[1] To that extent there must have been an erosion of caste values and the ritually prescribed codes of conduct. Tantricism however did not lead to the growth of a distinct sect claiming a monopoly of religious truth and directly challenging the orthodox Brahminical systems. It was essentially a mystic cult which, at the level of mass religion, could co-exist with other cults. Its subversive implications for the caste structure were indirect and on the whole limited in character. On the other hand the influence of Tantricism was so extensive that the more orthodox and genteel tradition of Brahminism had to compromise with it by adopting in a modified form many of its beliefs and ritual practices. Orthodoxy, however, firmly rejected the practitioner of the *kulachara* orgies. In Raghunandana's *smriti* a *kapalika* is as much an untouchable as a person of the lower caste.[2]

The other important sectarian development in the period was the neo-Vaishnava movement complete with its own particular form of challenge to Brahminical disciplinarianism and a claim to the monopoly of truth and salvation. Within the Chaitanya movement caste separation was significantly modified.[3] Even the barriers to inter-caste commensality were at least temporarily forgotten on the great religious occasions called the *Mahotsavas*. In our period, however, the followers of Chaitanya were being gradually reabsorbed into Hindu orthodoxy. *Inter alia* the *gosvamins* at Vrindavana drew up for them a new code of ritual conduct on the lines of the standard Hindu *smritis*.

At the lower level of Vaishnava society the Sahajiyas represented a more serious challenge to the established caste order and Brahminical values both in terms of their rejection of the caste system and their adoption of mystic beliefs and practices which had a clearly orgiastic dimension. In the characteristic tradition of Hindu sects, the lower order of Vaishnava society eventually constituted a new caste, the

1 *Supra*, p. 11, f. n. 2.
2 *Infra*, 129; *Raghu*, 193.
3 *Supra*, p. 25, f. n. 3.

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Boshtams, excluded from commensality with upper caste Vaishnavas and with a well-defined position in the hierarchy of Hindu castes.

Already in our period the growth of the Sahajiya cult revealed an interesting pattern of culture conflict. The tendency towards orgiastic practices were sought to be refined and presented in terms of transcendental mysticism.[1] That the development of Vaishnavism itself resulted in culture conflict is evident from the repeated references to vegetarianism as a laudable practice side by side with statements implying the acceptability of animal sacrifice both morally and ritually. This culture conflict is typically represented in the heart-searching of Mukundarama's Hunter Hero Kalaketu. He feels uncertain as to whether his profession which he has always followed in good faith is a source of sin or not.[2]

In relation to the comparative changelessness in the other areas of life, the developments in religion in our period were marked by significant mutations. Even the Mughal conquest and the administrative changes associated with it primarily affected only the top level of the political system. The expansion of the external market in India and abroad,—mostly after our period,—induced some changes in economic organisation. Their impact, however, was limited to relatively small sections of the population and did not go very deep.

This asymmetrical pattern of change is not easy to explain. It seems, however, to be fairly typical of historical developments in India in other periods and regions as well. One may venture a somewhat shaky hypothesis in explanation of this phenomenon. Compared to the caste organisation and the code of ritual conduct, the systems of political and economic relationships in India were relatively flexible and open, offering at least some scope to individual aspirations. Besides, the rural masses, the totally underprivileged bottom layer excepted, had only limited experience of political and economic inequality in their daily life. This may have reduced the potentialities of

[1] *Infra*, 134-35, 155f.

[2] *Chandi*, 71; Mukundarama himself while mentioning without any repugnance the custom of animal sacrifice (*ibid.*, 82) also informs us that he had long given up eating fish and meat (*ibid.*, 8).

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tension and hence of change, however intense the exploitation from above might have been. The tensions in the politico-economic system were contained within it through institutionalized expression in rebellions and mass migrations. Such sanctions were very much a part of the system, not instruments of change.

The rigorous hierarchy of the caste order and the severe demands of ritually correct conduct appear to have generated very deep tensions. The mechanism of adjustment had to be something radical. Since the caste order and the code of rituals were not backed by physical force, changes affecting these areas of life also did not involve its use. The task of innovation thus became relatively easy. The formation of sects as the institutionalized expression of tensions in the areas of belief, rituals and caste hierarchy is perhaps explicable in these terms. As Weber has pointed out, this too implied only a limited change, for the sects were reabsorbed into the caste order with hardly any exception, and thus brought back into the fold of ritualistic rigour. Sects immured in the folk tradition of a freer life tried hard to keep open a back-door of mystic culture. Their low status in the caste hierarchy probably derived partly from their caste origins and partly from their failure to conform totally.

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The undermentioned volumes published in recent years have some bearing on the subject-matter of the present work :

Irfan Habib,	*Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Asia Publishing House, 1963)
Abdui Karim,	*Social History of the Muslim in Bengal* (down to A.D. 1538) (Dacca, 1959).
	Dacca : The Mughal Capital (Dacca, 1964)
Anjali Chatterji,	*Bengal in the Reign of Aurangzeb, 1658-1707* (Calcutta, 1967).
M.R. Tarafdar,	*Hussain Shahi Bengal* (Dacca, 1959)

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Qazi Muhammad Misr. *Bagurar Itikahini* (in Bengali) (Dacca, 1957).
Rajshahir Itihas, 2 vols. (in Bengali) (Dacca, 1965).
A.F.M. Abdul Jalil *Sundarbaner Itihas* (in Bengali) (Khulna, 1967)

Dr. Om Prakash's unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Delhi University), "The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1650-1717" contains *inter alia* information which proves that the first Dutch settlements in Bengal were established only around 1650 and not earlier as is suggested in this book (*infra*, 97).

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March 31, 1969.

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PART I

THE NEW FORCES AT WORK

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CHAPTER I

MUGHAL RULE IN BENGAL

I. Land-marks in Bengal's political history, 1575-1627.

On March 3, 1575 Munim Khan decisively defeated Daud Karrani at the battle of Tukaroi and thereby laid the first foundation of Mughal rule in Bengal. On October 29, 1627 Emperor Nur-ud-din Jahangir passed away. Between these two dates,—if one is allowed to fix specific dates for a historical process,—Mughal rule in Bengal was consolidated. During these years the province witnessed many wars, campaigns, rebellions and a succession of conquering generals and viceroys. Such political events were perhaps not of any direct significance in the daily life of the common people. But the wars, the rebellions, the succession of viceroys brought about a slow change in the character of the administration and in the state of peace and security. The land-marks in the political history of Bengal between 1575 and 1627 thus assume, with a slight variation in emphasis, a considerable significance in the story of the life of the people.

The defeat of Daud Karrani on the battlefield of Tukaroi registered a claim to sovereignty. It did little more. Secure in his possession of Orissa, Daud continued to give trouble. Shielded by mighty rivers, Isa Khan and the *bhuiyas* enjoyed the fullest freedom and challenged actively the authority of the Mughals. On the battlefield of Rajmahal in July, 1576 the Mughals conquered Bengal a second time. Daud was executed and a great obstacle to consolidation of power thus removed. But Mughal rule in Bengal was yet far from secure. The

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conquest on the contrary unleashed new forces of anarchy. For Bengal, the years 1579 to 1583 were particularly gloomy. The Afghan chiefs were everywhere up in arms. With the rising of the Mughal captains and their usurpation of power during 1580-'82, all semblance of centralized authority vanished. The futile campaigns of general Shahbaz Khan against Isa Khan and the other *zamindars* of Bhati (1584-'85) mark the first serious attempt at assertion of authority. The patched up peace of 1586-'87 similarly marks the failure of this attempt. Thus twelve years after the initial Mughal conquest of Bengal, the province was still for all practical purposes a conglomeration of petty states ruled over by Afghan chiefs and Hindu princelings, some of whom formed an anti-Mughal confederacy under the leadership of Isa Khan.

In November, 1586 Akbar introduced uniform *subah* administration throughout his empire. A viceroy, a *diwan* and a *bakhshi* were sent accordingly to Bengal as well. But for years to come, the change was little more than theoretical. Wazir Khan, the first viceroy appointed under the new dispensation, died too early (August, 1587) to achieve anything. Said Khan, who enjoyed a longer lease of power (1587-'94) could make no more headway against the hostile forces all around.

The consolidation of Mughal power in Bengal and the pacification of the province really began in 1594. In that year Raja Man Singh Kachhwa was appointed viceroy and five thousand of Prince Salim's troops were granted *jagirs* in Bengal. In 1595, the Raja laid the foundations of a new capital at Rajmahal. Starting out from the capital in a campaign against Bhati, he dislodged the rebel chiefs from the lands west of Brahmaputra and in 1596, turned the frontier Kingdom of Kuch into a vassal state. The authority thus imposed on the greater part of Bengal and the peace which probably ensued in consequence were once more seriously shaken by the widespread revolt of 1600 when Man Singh was away from the province. He returned to his work of pacification in 1601. By 1603-'04, the turbulent chiefs of Bhati were effectively crushed for the time being and there ensued a period of comparative peace.

The five years of Islam Khan's viceroyalty (May, 1608—August, 1613) saw the virtual completion of Man Singh's work. In 1608, the *zamindars* of Birbhum, Pachet and Hijli were

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forced to accept vassalage, but allowed to retain their *jagirs*. The viceroy next turned his attention to East Bengal and the *bhuiyas* and *zamindars* submitted one after another. Satrajit of Bhushana submitted in 1609, entered imperial service and was confirmed in the possession of his lands. By 1611 Musa Khan, the son of Isa Khan, chief of the Bengal *zamindars* and his associates also laid down their arms. They were nominally confirmed in their *jagirs*, but forced to attend the viceregal court in person and put under surveillance. By 1612, Jessore and Bakla were also brought under the direct rule of the viceroy. In course of the same year Khwaja Usman was killed in battle and with the submission of Bayizid, the last resistance of the Afghans in Sylhet came to an end. Another significant development of the year was the transfer of capital to Dacca. Practically the whole territory within the geographical limits of Bengal was now under the firm sway of the Mughals. For the people at large, this fact implied at least freedom from perpetual warfare and consequent sufferings. Islam Khan now felt strong enough to venture further afield into Kachar and Kamrup.

Fresh troubles broke out during the next viceroyalty (1613-1617). The *zamindars* of Birbhum, Pachet, Hijli and Chandrakona, lukewarm in their loyalty, were however easily brought back to obedience. The Arakanese invasion of Bhulua (1614-'15), though unsuccessful, indicated a far more serious threat to peace and security which was to assume serious proportions in the years to come. During 1615-'16, the Mughals suffered two serious set-backs. An attempt to conquer Chittagong ended in an expensive failure while from Assam there came back the miserable remnants of a routed army.

With the appointment of Ibrahim Khan in 1617, opened a new era of short-lived peace which lasted with little interruption till 1623. The masses enjoyed once more the blessings of peace, security and even economic prosperity. The *zamindars* benefited by the viceroy's conciliatory policy and had their properties restored to them. But few as the disturbing factors were, their cumulative effect was hardly insignificant. In 1617, an expedition had to be sent against Bir Bhan of Chandrakona who "had been causing great annoyance to travellers passing by his territories". The revolt of Ibrahim Krori in the frontier

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territory of Kamrup was another source of trouble. The Ahom attacks on the same territory further strained the resources of the Mughal Government in Bengal. After the conquest of Tipperah in 1618, Bengal enjoyed peace for a couple of years until in 1620, the Arakan king sailed up to the very vicinity of Dacca and wrought havoc on the river-side villages. A second attempt to secure Chittagong (1621) failed like the first and thus gave fresh encouragement to Magh raids, while the Firingi raids in South-East Bengal continued as before. In 1621, a revolt of the Hijli *zamindar* assumed formidable proportions and could be crushed only with difficulty. Even the following two years of comparative peace were regularly interrupted by 'periodic and isolated revolts' in Kamrup.

Then in 1624 came the revolt of Shahjahan and his temporary occupation of Bengal. He found a ready ally in the dissatisfied elements and the habitual enemies of Mughal imperialism, e.g., the Maghs and the Portuguese. Bengal became the scene of a civil war in which Ibrahim Khan perished. The entire administration became topsy-turvy. The restoration of Jahangir's rule in 1625 and the governorship of Mahabat Khan brought in little improvement, for the latter's preoccupation with intrigues at the capital even enabled the Maghs to ravage successfully the metropolitan city of Dacca. A few months before his death, Jahangir appointed Fidai Khan (March, 1627) viceroy of Bengal. His one significant act was the stipulation "to remit yearly from Bengal, in the shape of presents, a sum of five lakhs for the Emperor and an equal amount for the Queen-consort Nurjehan". Evidently, peace was returning to Bengal, and with it, economic stability.

II. The pattern of Mughal rule in Bengal

The pattern of Mughal rule in Bengal throughout the period was of a complex character. Its dominant note was an attempt at centralisation. Its significance in the life of the people is to be measured with reference to the extent to which this attempt succeeded or failed.

The administrative structure of Bengal during the period under review had three distinct facets. First, there was the manifold control exercised by the central authority on the government of this province. Secondly, parts of the territory

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were directly administered by the provincial and local officers more or less after the same pattern as was to be found in the other *subahs* of the empire. Thirdly, over a fairly extensive territory semi-independent lordlings exercised their sway under the political hegemony of the Mughals.

III. Central control over provincial administration.

For Bengal, imperial control over the provincial administration was to some extent a reality from the very time of the conquest. From Munim Khan to Man Singh, all the generals who contributed to this piecemeal conquest were acting under the emperor's direct orders and, in case of incompetence, were liable to be recalled. But before the establishment of Mughal authority on a sound footing, particularly before the introduction of the uniform *subah* administration towards the very end of 1586, this central control was subject to obvious limitations. The hazards of the situation called for local initiative. An emperor as wise as Akbar naturally avoided putting any impediments in its way. Instead, he remained satisfied with the appointment as viceroy of one in whom he had absolute faith, —Man Singh. Gradually with the consolidation of power, the emperor's hold on the provincial administration also slowly tightened. It found material expression through a number of offices created for the purpose of check and balance and through a system of regular administrative measures meant to control the local authorities and to keep the emperor informed of the goings on in the province. Rules laid down for the succession of *subahdars* in Bengal prove the strength of the central control: if the *subahdar* of Bengal died, the highest imperial officer at Monghyr was to take charge; if there was no such officer, then the governor of Bihar was to take over. Further evidences of this growing strength are to be found in the dismissal of Qasim Khan and the similar orders received by his predecessor. The obligation to send *peshkash* regularly to the imperial court defined Bengal's relationship with the centre in even clearer terms. At the early stage, when the income of the provincial exchequer was necessarily uncertain, the *peshkash* was naturally paid both in cash and kind. In Islam Khan's days eunuchs 'were procured specially for imperial *peshkash*'. In the next regime, 'the revenues of the Crown-lands as shown

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in the register of cash-realisation (*tumar*)' had to be sent to the capital. Qasim Khan, despite obvious reluctance, was forced to send with an imperial courier two *lakhs* in cash besides a bond (*tamassuk*) for the balance due, promising to send it through agents. In 1627, ten *lakhs* of rupees were sent as *peshkash* and Fidai Khan, the *subahdar*, stipulated to send five lakhs as annual tribute. Besides the usual *peshkash*, the booty sent by the campaigning generals to the *subahdars* would at times go directly to the imperial court. During Islam Khan's viceroyalty, an expert was sent from Agra to fetch the courtesans and musicians from the provincial court.

The *subah* administration, as organised by Akbar in 1586-'87, was based largely on a system of check and balance. The *diwan's* extensive powers over the provincial exchequer and the *bakhshi's* control over all matters of military finance, detracted much from the *subahdar's* autocratic authority in the province. The *waqai-navis* or news-reporter, on the other hand, acted as a direct link with the centre and hence as a check on all viceregal excesses. He was instructed "to send to the imperial Court reports of events and doings of the provincial governors". . . . and "had instructions not to show them to the *subahdars*." In 1587, all these officers were appointed directly by the emperor in Bengal as well as in other *subahs* of the empire. But it was only at a later date, in the reign of Jahangir, that they really made their power felt. The replacement of Islam Khan by Shajaat Khan as viceroy was ordered apparently on the basis of reports received from Yaghma Isfahani, the *waqai-navis*. In the days of Qasim Khan, the power of the *subahdar* was almost overshadowed by that of the *diwan*. His 'corruption evil ways and arrogance' called for some sort of check and the emperor decided to procure it by appointing Mukhlis Khan 'to the combined office of the *diwan*, *bakhshi* and *waqai-navis* of Bengal,' so that the 'whimsical Khan' might be overpowered 'in questions and replies'. It was clearly stated that if the new *diwan* found Qasim Khan to be 'unfit for subahdarship,' the latter would be dismissed. The *diwan* was also empowered to delegate authority and he presently appointed his own son as *bakhshi*. Hence Mukhlis Khan really acted as the emperor's personal representative and there followed a prolonged conflict between him and the *subahdar*. The jealous vigilance of the imperial

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mansabdars acting in various offices in the province also acted as a constant check on the activities of the viceroy. In matters of official preference the imperial *mansabdars* were rivals of the *subahdar's* officers and when Islam Khan seemed inclined to show undue favour to his own men, the *mansabdars* sent a joint appeal to the emperor seeking redress of their grievances. Islam Khan received a sharp reproof in consequence.

At times the emperor would interfere in the viceroy's activities even more directly. In matters of great consequence, in particular, the *subahdar* was obliged to consult the emperor. And if the former showed a spirit unduly independent, detailed regulations or sharply-worded *farmans* came from the court to bring him back to the path of loyalty. The most notable instance in point is the imperial ordinance issued by Jahangir in the sixth year of his reign during Islam Khan's viceroyalty in Bengal. In it, particular attention was drawn to the imperial style assumed by Islam Khan and its immediate discontinuation ordered; the great imperial officers were not to be compelled to follow the officers of the *subahdars* ; and the *subahdar* was to ensure that the officers worked honestly and faithfully, "strictly in accordance with imperial regulations". From time to time, the emperor sent his personal couriers to bestow rewards and administer reproofs. *Khilats*, horses and other valuables came regularly from the emperor in token of his approval of the officers' good deeds. Often again, the courier brought *farmans* bearing sharp words of admonition, which the *subahdar* and the officers concerned were obliged to accept in all humility,— taking them with both the hands, 'one after the other', and placing them on the head. Thus was Shaykh ibn Yamin sent to Islam Khan and Ibrahim Kalal to the next viceroy. Ibrahim Kalal was sent not to warn the *subahdar* alone, but to sternly admonish the *bakhshi*, the *diwan* and the *waqai-navis* as well. Punishments would often follow in the wake of such warnings and even the highest was not beyond the pale of the imperial wrath in this respect. Reduction of *mansabs* seems to have been the most usual form of punishment. Islam Khan's *mansab* was reduced for his not accompanying the campaign against Usman while a similar punishment befell Mukhlis Khan because of his failure to check Qasim Khan's excesses. Disobedience of officers, too powerful to be dealt with success-

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fully by the viceroy, might be reported to the emperor and punished with such measures as forfeiture of honorific titles. The fear of imperial investigation acted as a constant and salutary check on official delinquency. After Qasim Khan's conflict with the *diwan*, Sadat Khan was sent from Agra to investigate the matter and the governor ordered to redress the *diwan's* grievances on pain of punishments. Following the suppression of Ibrahim Krori's revolt, the officers and soldiers hastily restored all properties seized by them for fear of inquiries. Even the Khan Fath-i-Jang, who enjoyed His Majesty's fullest confidence, restored to his *jagir* an officer in Kuch,—formerly dismissed on sufficient grounds,—lest the disaster in that region should later be attributed to this dismissal. And even when there was no specific investigation in view, an imperial messenger might visit the distant *thanas*, distributing presents and inspecting the defence and thus maintain a direct link between Agra and the most outlying regions of the new *subah*. The officers' promotion depended ultimately on the emperor, though the reports sent by the *subahdar* had much to do with it. Hence the strict instructions requiring the viceroy to send correct reports, the officers' eagerness to inform His Majesty of their exploits through independent means and the enormous *peshkash* sent by individual officers to the imperial court. 'The total value of the *peshkash*, rare gifts and elephants' sent by Nathan, the author of *Baharistan*, to the imperial court in anticipation of a promotion, amounted to forty-two thousand rupees. Thus there existed a direct relation between the emperor and the officers of this outlying *subah* which checked to a considerable extent all centrifugal tendencies within the administrative frame-work. The Mughal law of escheat, whereby the residue of the officer's property at his death was forfeited to His Majesty's treasury, was a further bond between the Emperor and his officers, though a harsh and cruel one. But surely it acted as a strong link in the chain of centralisation. For an officer like Nathan's father might die at one far corner of the province ; still, an exact account of his property would have to be rendered and the residue carried to Agra to the very last farthing. Perhaps, above everything else, a subtle, intangible bond acted as the strongest link between the emperor and his men : it was the bond of loyalty forged

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by a semi-religious,—almost super-human,—awe and reverence inspired by the name of the emperor. It is not our business here to inquire into the origins of this attitude. Nor is it true to say that the cases of disloyalty and defiance were even infrequent. But a study of the works of such Bengal officers as Talish and Nathan points inevitably to the conclusion that to the majority of the officers in this far away province, the emperor was the highest master, the *pir* and the *qibla* and his sublime court, the ultimate resort in matters spiritual as well as temporal.

The emperor's relation with his subjects was necessarily much feebler. But the custom of sending the rebel chiefs reduced to vassalage to the imperial court in the days before Ibrahim Khan's viceroyalty, the grant of *mansabs* to the local chiefs, the occasional judicial appeals to the imperial court—all these gradually established a relationship, though never very direct, between the emperor and the people of Bengal. The emperor's name attained a significant familiarity in the common parlance of the day and seemingly became synonymous with royalty at all times. For the erudite poet of *Chaitanyacharitamrita* refers casually to Hussain Shah, not as *sultan*, but as *padshah*.

The days of Bengal's autonomy were definitely over. For the sake of convenience and efficiency, the reins of central control were no doubt loosened a great deal. But in case the *subahdar* or any lower officer proved restive, the emperor's arm was always long enough to reach the farthest corner of the newly conquered province, often over the heads of the *sabahdars*. Such interference, however, was exceptional, not regular.

IV. The administrative set up : deviations from general practice.

The structure of Mughal administration within Bengal was roughly similar to that in other provinces. But if one aims at accuracy, it is safer not to overstress this fact of uniformity with regard to Bengal, particularly for the period under review. For in studying Bengal's administrative set-up during 1575-1627, the background of the wars of conquest and political strifes has to be borne in mind. Amidst these widespread conflicts which continued with short breaks to the very end of

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the period, it was hardly possible to achieve administrative systematisation to the same extent as in the more peaceful provinces. Hence, for the present purpose, the *subah* administration as described in the *Ain-i-Akbari* has to be considered as an ideal from which the deviations were many and frequent.

The *subahdar*, here as elsewhere, was the executive head of the province. The *diwan* as the head of the financial organisation enjoyed co-ordinate authority. Then there were the *bakhshi*, or the military pay-master-general and the *waqai navis*, or news-reporter, whose function, as already explained, was much more important than his modest designation suggests. The division of the province into *sarkars* and of the *sarkars* into *parganas* was current in Bengal as well. The *faujdar* in charge of the *sarkar* and the *shiqdar* in charge of the *pargana* were also familiar features of the Mughal administration in Bengal. The *faujdar*, as described in the *Ain,* was however not necessarily in charge of a *sarkar*, but of 'several *parganas*'. The appointment of Nathan's brother as the *faujdar* of several *parganas* points towards a similar practice.

Here one must stop to note an important deviation from the usual practice. The demarcation of *sarkars* and *parganas* presupposes an advanced stage in the consolidation of political authority. But to the very end of Islam Khan's viceroyalty (1608-'13) territories had to be wrested from the clutches of hostile forces. Tippera was conquered even later, in 1618. The Magh and Firingi raids continued throughout the period, and in fact, much longer. Hence in considerable parts of the province the conditions were often those of war and the representatives of the imperial power were obliged to function as an army of occupation. Such soil was hardly congenial to the *sarkar* administration, devised for more peaceful climes. So while with the progress of peace and security, the *faujdars* and the *shiqdars* took charge of *sarkars* and *parganas* in many parts, for the rest a sort of stop-gap arrangement had to be introduced. Following the conquest of a particular territory, one or more *thanas* would be set up, each with a *thanadar* or *faujdar* and a garrison under him. Pacification of the locality, suppression of refractory tendencies, preservation of law and order and, as things settled down, introduction of regular peaceful administration,—such were the duties of the *thanadar*

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and his garrison. In more than one unit of administration this stop-gap character seems to have persisted even long after the initial conquest. The epithet, '*sardar*', is used with reference to the officers in charge of the administration of such places as Sylhet and Jessore even as late as the days of Ibrahim Khan's administration. The exact nature of the functions of the *sardar* is not quite clear. But the stray references in the *Baharistan* to this particular office would suggest that the *sardar* was in sole charge of the administration of such territories as might be put under his care, the duty of maintaining peace and security being particularly underlined. The chief accusation against Suhrab Khan, the *sardar* of Jessore, for example, was that he had failed to protect the territory from Firingi raids, and when he was restored to office following a threat of dismissal, "a letter of covenant was taken from him making him responsible for the protection of Jessore". On the basis of such meagre facts, one may venture a suggestion that the vague designation of *sardar* was applied to an office which was in the nature of a half-way house between the *thanadar* (also indiscriminately referred to as *faujdar*) in charge of a newly occupied territory and the *faujdar*, who was the executive and military head of a regularly administered *sarkar* or some similar unit of administration. Besides the offices of the *faujdar* and the *sardar*, Nathan also refers to the post of wardens of such strategic places as Rajmahal and Burdwan. The administration of the *sarkar*, as also of the units under the *sardars*, was in certain ways a miniature replica of the *subah* administration. A *diwan*, a *bakhshi* and a *waqai-navis* were appointed apparently in every such unit of administration and discharged functions similar to those of their superior name-sakes. But on more than one occasion the three offices were vested in one and the same person. In some cases at least, these appointments were made by the *diwan* and one may assume that the officers thus appointed were responsible to him.

Besides these officers in charge of financial and general administration, some others deserve special mention. One was the *qazi*, the law-officer and judge, who not merely judged cases, but also registered sales. Another was the *kotwal*, the police-chief. A third was the *sadr*, the officer in charge of ecclesiastical grants, who, interestingly enough, is never

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mentioned in the *Baharistan*, but features prominently in the list of oppressive officers in a later work,—the continuation of the *Fathiyya-i-Ibriyah*. From the information at our disposal, it is difficult to say definitely whether a *qazi* and a *kotwal* were posted in every town. But it seems fairly certain that every important town and outpost had a *kotwali chabutara*. Then, there were the *kroris*, revenue-collectors in charge of particular areas and their subordinate staff of official and demi-official functionaries. Lastly, there were the imperial *mansabdars*, *ahadis* and *subahdars*' officers without any specific office, but called upon to discharge various functions as the need might arise from time to time. Their chief duties, however, seem to have consisted in participation in campaigns and in the establishment of peaceful administration. A numerous host of clerical and menial staff, characteristic of the Mughal administration everywhere, were attached to the different departments of government. They, along with hired labourers, attended to the smooth working of the many wheels of the administrative machinery.

V. Viceregal control and the position of local officers.

In the preceding paragraphs, an attempt has been made to define the structure of Mughal rule in Bengal in the directly administered areas. Here it would be well to take note of some aspects of the actual working of the system. At the top was the *subahdar* who enjoyed a practical monopoly of initiative with regard to the formulation of administrative policy within the limits set by the imperial regulations. In him was also vested the ultimate authority as regards the actual execution of this policy. In other words, so long as he was not violating the laws of the empire, every officer in the province was obliged to accept his control. As Abul-Fazl put it somewhat vaguely. "He is the vicegerent of His Majesty. The troops and people of the province are under his orders and their welfare depends upon his just administration". Only in the very important domain of finance the *diwan* had a similar monopoly of power, and thereby enjoyed with the *subahdar* a co-ordinate authority. Thus in theory,—and to some extent in practice,—power in the Mughal *subah* of Bengal was centralised in the hands of the *subahdar* and his associates.

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But then, it was so only to some extent. When a new territory was conquered, it was the commanding officer of the conquering troops rather than the viceroy, who proved to be the master of the situation. In most cases, *thanas* with garrisons were set up to attend to the primary duty of maintenance of law and order. In others, the viceroy might entrust the administration of a region to some trustworthy officer who would deal with the local situation in his own way. Thus, 'after the submission of Pratapaditya,. . . .the administration of the territory of Jessore was assigned to Ghiyas Khan'. At about the same time, Saiyid Hakim and others were left in charge of Bakla. But often again, the officer who conquered or pacified a territory appointed his own men to take charge of the locality. On the submission of the *zamindars* of *pargana*, Jahanabad, Mirza Nathan sent his elder brother as the *faujdar* of that region and concluded the necessary arrangements with the *zamindars* on his own initiative. On the surrender of Bayizid Karrani and his brothers, Shaykh Kamal left a number of imperial officers in Sylhet under the command of Mubariz Khan, and the administration of the country was entrusted to one of his own trusted officers. Mirza Yusuf Barlas, after he had 'brought most of the *parganas* of Dakhinkul under his general control', himself 'began to collect revenue'. Whatever the formal administrative regulations might have been, it appears that the officers in charge of particular territories first sought to establish order. That primary task accomplished, they next turned their attention to collection of revenue, either through their own men, or through a *krori*, appointed either by the provincial government or by themselves. In one instance at least the *faujdar* was himself the *krori*. During our period there is little evidence of any further activity on the part of the government in the *pargana* or the *sarkar*, excepting of course such functions as were discharged by the *qazi* and the *kotwal*.

Among the directly administered areas we have also to take note of the officers' *jagirs*. Here, the particular officers were apparently the sole authorities and the administration of such territories seems to have been carried on exclusively by the officers' men.

Normally, it may be said, there was little interference with the activities of the local officers. The evidence of silence on

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this point is sufficiently convincing. More positive testimony is also available. Ibrahim Khan took steps against the inefficient *sardar* of Jessore only when the Firingi raids assumed dangerous proportions due to the officer's negligence. And the people of Khuntaghat rebelled repeatedly against their oppressive officers, as the provincial government did little to check their oppression. In the *jagirs*, the officers' authority was absolute to an even greater degree. Except for transfers,—which, however, were often frequent.—we do not read of any interference on part of the provincial government in the administration of such territories. The transfers also were due either to reasons of administrative convenience or to wire-pullings and other personal factors. In any case, these had little reference to the internal administration of the *jagirs*, where a transfer only meant a new master and his new staff of subordinates. The mild or oppressive character of the *jagir* administration depended, we may assume, entirely on the temperament of the particular officer holding a *jagir*.

It is not true to say, however, that the administration in the *sarkars* and *parganas* was carried on by the officers posted there quite independently of the *subahdar*. Cases of interference were indeed neither frequent nor normal. Perhaps this was so because from the point of view of the government,—which is to be distinguished from the point of view of the people,—the officers generally kept themselves within the prescribed limits. In case such limits were overstepped, retribution was not slow to come. Leaving one's post without the governor's orders was, for instance, considered a reprehensible offence and might be punished by confiscation of *jagirs* and even by imprisonment. Withholding of government revenue called for sterner measures, and one officer, Ibrahim Krori, guilty of such delinquency, eventually rebelled to save himself from severe punishment. Even the semi-independent '*Musundulim*' of Hijli, Manrique informs us, readily agreed to give full satisfaction to the viceroy, when the latter demanded his share of the dues from Portuguese ships. Occasionally, complaints from the *ryots* might also lead to punishment, but a timely word put in by an influential friend at the court would save the oppressor. Possibilities of dismissal and the practice of transfer constituted another check on the activities of the officer. An officer might

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be transferred either from his office or from his *jagir* to another one. Among the other methods of central control may be mentioned the occasional inspection of the officers' muster roll by agents of the provincial pay-master-general *(bakhshi-i-kul)*. Besides, the viceroy had regular and constant contact with the *subah's* expanding frontiers as also with the forces operating in the rebellious parts of the country. "It was the practice of Islam Khan to send reinforcements one after another to the help of the imperialists, from the day the army was sent till the conquest was achieved."

The same *subahdar* received the news of the attack on Dhubri through his *kotwal*, "who came there a few days before the war and returned after it". It was also the usual practice of the *subahdars* to regularly secure correct information regarding the valour and services of the officers at the front and send reports to the imperial court. Promotions and honours were granted on the basis of such reports.

VI. Territories under the local chiefs.

A very considerable part of the territory of Bengal continued, for all practical purposes, to be governed by the native rulers,—both Hindus and Afghans. More than three decades of almost continuous warfare brought their political independence to an end. But their administrative autonomy was little affected. Many of these *zamindars*, some of the *bara bhuiyas* in particular, were no doubt upstarts who had grabbed territories during the period of transition from Afghan to Mughal rule. But this statement perhaps does not apply to a large number of the *zamindar* families of the early Mughal days. For many of them were hereditary lords of the land,—descendants of various princelings who had carved out petty kingdoms for themselves during one or other of the troubled periods in pre-Mughal Bengal. Some of them could surely trace back the early beginnings of their power even to the Hindu period. The Malla Rajas of Vana Vishnupura have a history going back to the seventh century A.D. The Rajas of Shushang, as also some other Varendra Brahmin families of Mymensingh, similarly established their power in that outlying part of Bengal towards the close of the Hindu period. Many more, to be sure, can trace back their history to the 15th and the 14th centuries, as a study of the

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district histories, often based on more or less dependable local traditions, family records and caste annals, shows quite clearly. Of the *bhuiyas* too at least one, viz., the *bhuiya* of Chandradwipa was no mere upstart of the period of transition.

Till 1594, as we have seen, many of these princelings enjoyed not only administrative autonomy but, for all practical purposes, political independence as well. Thereafter, Man Singh subjugated the greater part of Bengal, defeated the *bhuiyas* in battle and annexed the territory of one of them,—Kedar Rai of Sripur. The rest were brought under the Mughal yoke by Islam Khan. Towards the *bhuiyas*, Islam Khan followed a more or less uniform policy. Parts of their territories,—the whole in case of Jessore,—were directly annexed and the rest was nominally restored to them as their *jagir*. Their flotillas were seized, and in some cases no part of their lands were directly annexed in view of this seizure. They were made to accept vassalage of the empire and also drafted into imperial service as *mansabdars*. Further, they were placed under surveillance and forced to attend personally at the *subahdar's* court. Some of them were also sent to the imperial court, apparently for a short period. Thus the semi-independent princelings were all reduced to the position of *jagirdars* or subordinate *zamindars*. Some also became officers of the Mughal empire.

How were the territories of the *zamindars* governed during their period of surveillance ? This is a question which can be answered only vaguely in the present state of our knowledge. We are to remember, in the first place, that the restoration of territories in the form of *jagir* was not always nominal. Nor were all the *zamindars* drafted into imperial service or placed under surveillance. This seems to have been particularly true of the *zamindars* of West Bengal. The *zamindars* of Birbhum, Pachet, Hijli and Chandrakona, for instance, retained their independence to a sufficient degree to be able to rebel during Qasim Khan's viceroyalty, while the unruly activities of Bir Bhan of Chandrakona necessitated an expedition as late as 1617. The petty *zamindars* of Barda and Jhakra in Midnapore who submitted to Nathan during Islam Khan's rule also retained their territories as *jagirs* and were allowed to return, only a minor being "kept in . . . service." The *Rasikamangala* of Gopijanavallabha Dasa

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describes the semi-independent status of one Balabhadra Dasa of Hijli in the early part of the 17th century. In East Bengal, too, those who became willing partisans of the imperialists, e.g., Raja Raghunatha of Shushang, were allowed to continue as before on their acceptance of vassalage. The temporary forfeiture of personal liberty was then, apparently, a measure directed against the turbulent *bhuiyas* and such other *zamindars* of Bhati who offered a stiff resistance and were likely to cause further trouble. The rest, so long as they observed the terms of the vassalage, were probably left undisturbed in the government of their estates.

As to the administration of the territories of the *bhuiyas*, information supplied casually by Nathan is of some significance. "Islam Khan", he tells us, "assigned as much of the territories of Rama Chandra to him as was necessary for the maintenance of his fleet; the rest was given to the *kroris* and *jagirdars*". Elsewhere we are informed that Sayid Hakim and his brothers were put in charge of Bakla. From these two statements one fact clearly emerges : a part of Rama Chandra's territory was to be directly administered by Mughal officers,—*kroris* and *jagirdars*,—under the supervision of some higher officials ; the other part was evidently not to be so administered. Now let us consider the case of Sylhet, after the submission of Bayizid Karrani and his fellow Afghan chiefs. Here, the procedure was much simpler. The Afghans were feted and feasted all night and laid under 'the burden of being true to the salt'. But no pretence of restoration of their territories was made. They, on the contrary, were to be sent to the imperial court and the administration of Sylhet was entrusted to one of Shaykh Kamal's officers and a number of imperial officers under Mubariz Khan were left there with the object of preserving law and order. Jessore, after the fall of Pratapaditya, was similarly administered. To Musa Khan and the *bhuiyas* generally, a third type of treatment was meted out. While they were drafted into imperial service and put under surveillance, "the estate of each of them was given to them as *jagir* for their maintenance". On the basis of a comparison of these three types of treatment, a conclusion as to the manner in which the *jagir* of the *zamindars* under surveillance was administered seems authorised: In so far as the political, and even personal liberty of these *zamindars* was curtailed, the

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restoration of territories was indeed nominal ; but since Nathan clearly mentions the appointment of officers and revenue-collectors to territories directly annexed and remains silent as regards the internal administration of the territories restored, we are left to assume that they continued to be governed as before and administered by the *zamindars*' men as representatives of their absentee masters.

With the introduction of Ibrahim Khan's policy of reconciliation and his release of political prisoners the anomaly mentioned above came to an end. A more or less uniform relationship was now established between the Mughal government and the *zamindars* who now became full-fledged vassals of the empire. The restoration of territories now was no longer nominal but real. Meanwhile, another peculiar development is said to have taken place. In place of the *bhuiyas* who had either fallen in their struggle with the Mughals or whose estates had been divided among others, numerous *taluks* and petty *zamindaries* had come into being. Now all these various landlords apparently came to enjoy the same privileges as the older houses. The agreement between the Mughal administration and the landlords was a simple one. The documents in the possession of many old *zamindar* families,—supposing of course that these are genuine, —clarify the nature of this relationship. Though these documents mostly belong to a period slightly later than the one under review, there is nothing to indicate that they reflect any changed circumstances. A *farman* from Shahjahan, for instance, called upon the *mansabdars*, *jagirdars*, *chaudhuris* and *qanungos* to acknowledge the Raja of Narayangarh as the *zamindar* of the locality and let him enjoy his customary rights without interference. The *zamindar*, in return, was required to be punctilious in his remittances of revenue and to look after the welfare of the people. Letters from Prince Shuja during his *subahdarship* to the Raja of Shushang refer to similar rights of the Raja and also to his obligation to regularly send *agar* wood and ivory as *peshkash*. *Khilats* and horses were sent regularly in token of the emperor's kindness to his vassals. Services rendered by the *zamindars* to the imperial cause either as *mansabdars* or as vassals constituted yet another link. The *bhuiyas*, as *mansabdars*, helped in conquest and pacification. The *bhuiyas* of Chandradwip and the Thakurtas of Banaripara fought the Maghs and

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Firingis on behalf of the Mughals and received *hissajat* and *nowara* lands in return. Though the imperial *farmans* mention multifarious duties, it seems fairly certain that only non-payment of revenue, rebellion or the *subahdar's* ill-will might lead to loss of a *zamindary* or, in fact, to interference in any other form. For nowhere do we read of any direct intervention in the internal administration of such estates. It was only when a *zamindar* like Chandrabhan became odious to the people of the neighbourhood and a menace to law and order, that steps were taken to assert governmental authority. Succession was practically hereditary, though the form of fresh investiture at successions was there.

So within their estates, the *zamindars* enjoyed autonomy in the truest sense of the term. Grant's generalisation regarding the power of the *zamindars* in Bengal towards the close of Muslim rule and, to some extent, throughout the Mughal period, may be accepted as being largely correct in view of other contemporary evidence. The *zamindars*, "as native guardians of the public peace and private rights," he tells us, "relieved their ignorant, voluptuous Mussulman rulers from the intricate troublesome detail of internal police, and management of Mofussil Collections". The uncomplimentary adjectives are hardly applicable to the pioneers of Mughal rule in Bengal, nor is it correct to say that in our period police and revenue administrations of the whole *subah* were left to the *zamindars*. But with regard to such matters, they were almost certainly the masters of the situation within their estates. In the literature of the period, even the small *zamindars* appear as Rajas, omnipotent within their territories, while the representatives of the imperial power seem to be a distant reality hardly intruding into the *zamindars'* sphere of influence. Describing the state of administration in Jessore as the British found it on taking over, Westland gives us an account very similar to that of Grant. The *zamindars* at this stage are described as 'contractors for the general administration'. "The duties of police were in their hands, and they had to keep up police establishments". They, or rather their subordinates, also "had a good deal to do with the adjudication of petty disputes, whether of a criminal or of a civil nature". There are reasons to suppose that in the period under review, the *zamindars* enjoyed similar powers within their

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particular territories, though not in the province as a whole. When Murshid Quli tried to reorganise the finances of Bengal, he merely put the *zamindars* under a binding obligation to pay their revenues regularly. Even this sole mark of bondage had apparently been ignored in the preceding years, when Mughal authority is supposed to have been most firmly entrenched in Bengal. Is it too much to suppose, then, specially in view of the supporting evidence, that during the first stormy half-century of Mughal rule, the Bengal *zamindars* who became willing partisans of the conquering power were left free to administer their estates in their own fashion with a monopoly of police and judicial functions? In the days of the devout Aurangzeb, a Muslim appellant from Shushang to the imperial court was referred back,—a letter in the possession of the Shushang Raj family tells us,—to the Hindu Raja of his home district, so that justice might be done on the spot. Surely in the earlier epoch such appeals were rare, and even if any were at all made to the court at Agra or at Dacca, one may well wonder whether they were not similarly referred back to the local princeling for adjudication.

The autonomy exercised by the *zamindars* in internal affairs was hardly always beneficial to the common man. Local traditions and family histories are full of lurid tales of *zamindars'* oppression, many of which date back to the early days of Mughal rule. The Chaudhuris of Nawapara, Baidya *zamindars* who obtained possession of some of Kedar Ray's villages, to mention only one instance, are said to have grown proverbially oppressive and turned 750 families into their slaves (*nafars*) with no interference from the ruling power, so that the local people were obliged to organise resistance with some leading families at their head. It was only in the days of Sarfaraz Khan that, after long generations of suffering and strife, the provincial government intervened directly, and put an end to this oppression.

The depredations caused by the *zamindars* often over-stepped the limits of their own frontiers, and the instance of Chandrabhan is not the only one in point. The perpetual conflicts between the various princelings which marked the pre-Mughal period of Bengal's history were truly at an end. But outbursts of the old lawless spirit were still not very infrequent. The

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zamindars of Bagri and Bishnupur in the Midnapore district continued their mutual struggles to the very end of the seventeenth century. In Jahangir's reign, Nathan regretfully informs us, "Raja Satrajit (of Bhushana) the vassal *zamindar*, was in the habit of molesting friendly chiefs." Thus for the numerous Bengal ryots and other classes of people living under the *zamindars*, the transition from Turko-Afghan to Mughal rule was a political one in the main. The administrative changes following in its wake,—the mighty machinery of Mughal centralisation,—altered their lives but little.

VII. Administration of Revenue in directly administered areas.

No account of Bengal's administrative set-up under the Mughals can be complete without a description of the revenue arrangements. For in those days, when governmental activities were necessarily limited in scope, it was at this point that the administration touched the life of the people most directly.

The starting point in our study of the revenue history of Bengal under the Mughals is the meagre account in Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari*. "The demands of each year," it runs, "are paid by instalments in eight months, they (the ryots) themselves bringing *mohurs* and rupees to the appointed place for the receipt of revenue, as the division of grain between the government and the husbandman is not here customary. The harvests are always abundant, measurement is not insisted upon, and the revenue demands are determined by estimate of the crop. His majesty in his goodness has confirmed this custom". From this brief account we learn, first, of the payment of the annual 'demands' in eight monthly instalments. The *Baharistan* however refers to two collections a year following the two harvests in autumn and spring. Secondly, we are told of the payments being made in cash, and that directly to the government. The last mentioned fact can, of course, refer only to the directly administered parts of the *Khalisa* lands. Finally, there follows the most important information that the method of crop-estimation, not measurement, was current in this province. But it may as well be noted here that though measurement was 'not insisted upon', it was not entirely unknown either. The statement that Nathan's men went to 'survey and inspect the

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villages' in Tajpur-Purnea may be a casual slip of the pen,—understandable in a man familiar with the upper Indian custom of survey and measurement,—or even a vague reference to the method of crop-estimation itself, for it is the only statement of its kind occurring in the *Baharistan*. But Mukundarama's woeful tale of the oppressive *shiqdar* who measured 15 *cottahs* to a *bigha* cannot perhaps be explained in any such way. So we are left to conclude that, while in most of the areas the system of crop-estimation was current, in some at least, that of survey and measurement was also in vogue.

The Government's income was derived from two main sources. Of these, land (*mal*) of course was the more important one. The other was known by the general name of *sair* duties, 'arising from a variety of imposts chiefly on personal property'. As to the land arrangement, the total taxable area may be said to have been divided into three broad classes. First, there was the *Khalsa sharifa*, or the crown-lands directly administered by the revenue department of the provincial government. Secondly, there were the assignments or *jagirs* granted to officers for their maintenance. These two types, however, seem to have often overlapped each other. Thirdly, there were the lands of the *zamindars* or semi-independent chiefs, often formally conferred on them as their assignments. In most cases, these lands were but only such as the *zamindars* themselves possessed at the time of their acceptance of vassalage. Besides these, there were also the rent-free lands granted for various reasons. But such lands, in practice, formed parts of one or other of the three classes mentioned above.

The *khalisa* lands might be administered for revenue purposes either directly by the officers of the government or leased out to revenue-farmers known as *mustajirs*. In either case, the revenue realised from these lands was to go to the imperial court. The part of the *khalisa* land directly managed by the state might again be administered in one of two alternative ways. The collections might be made either through the *kroris* and *faujdars* or the lands might be entrusted to individual officers and receipts taken for the same. The receipts apparently implied the officers' responsibility for collection of the amounts shown in the *tumar*. Nathan further informs us that "whatever (revenue) falls short in the crown-lands (*khalisa*) must be

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written in the name of some one." It may either imply the joint responsibility of the officers administering crown-lands or, what is more probable, the obligation of particular officers to pay up any deficit in collection. The initial arrangements for revenue collection were made either by the officer who conquered or was charged with the pacification of a locality or by the *diwan* of the particular area in question. Assessment and preparation of a rent-roll (*nuskha*) were necessarily the primary tasks of the *diwan* or the officer charged with revenue-management of a locality. An officer, assisted no doubt by a subordinate staff, would be sent to prepare the rent-roll or register of revenues. The ideal register was to be prepared on the basis of "an estimate of the revenues" with the consent of the ryots and to the advantage of the imperial treasury. It was to be signed by the *qanungos* and the *qabuliyats* (deeds or agreement) of the *chaudhuris* were to be enclosed with it. The register thus prepared would be kept in the government record-office in charge of the accountants of the officer concerned, to be enforced on the ryots and the *jagirdars*. On the rent-roll being prepared, the *diwan* or the officer in charge divided the territory into 'well-defined circles' (*chakla*) and entrusted one part of the lands to *mustajirs* and the other to *kroris* and *faujdars*. The division of revenue-paying territories into well-defined circles does not, however, seem to have been universally practised. In any case, 'necessary arrangements for each' of the collectors were made, implying apparently that everyone of them had to enter into agreements individually with the government regarding collections. Of the officers appointed by the government for the purpose, the *krori* was the chief. Evidently his duties no longer corresponded to the literal implication of his designation (*viz.*, collector in charge of an artificial revenue-circle yielding one crore of *dams*), but were far more general in character. He appears in our sources simply as the chief revenue-collector of a region. Shaykh Ibrahim was appointed *krori* for the whole country of Kamrup. Following the establishment of a *thana* in Rangalikhata, a junior *mansabdar* received this appointment for the region. But a number of *kroris* might also be appointed for a particular locality, perhaps one for each *chakla*, where such divisions were introduced.

Of the subordinate staff of official and semi-official functionaries

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who assisted in the collection of revenue, three deserve special mention: First, there was the *karkun* or registrar of the collection of revenues, an employee of the government, apparently associated with the *krori*. Secondly, there were the *qanungos*, a hereditary class of local assessors who assisted the government in the preparation of the rent-roll. Thirdly, there were the *chaudhuris*, or village headmen whose *qabuliyats* accompanying the *nuskha* suggest that in some cases at least collections were made through them, and not directly by the government officers from the ryots. The revenue arrangement in Bakla, where a part of the territory was entrusted to *kroris* and *chaudhuris*, further indicates that this was really the case. Evidence of direct payment, found in *Ain* as also in the *Baharistan*, however, disproves quite clearly the theory put forward by Moreland that collections were made through farmers and village headmen only. Besides, the *qabuliyats*, like the *qanungos'* signatures, might also be meant merely to testify to the correctness of the rent-roll and incidentally to the obligation of the villagers to abide by its terms. To these three classes of men associated with revenue-collection, we are to add of course, the ubiquitous *mutasuddis* or accountants. The latter, however, were associated not merely with revenue-collection, but other branches of administration as well. Occasionally, we also hear of soldiers assisting the collectors, specially in the newly conquered territories. As Moreland correctly guessed, the accuracy of the rent-roll and revenue accounts in general could not be accepted merely on the good faith of assessors and officers. The *mutasuddis*, it appears, were entrusted with the task of checking the accounts though occasionally special parties might also be secretly sent to check the authenticity of rent-rolls. This complex machinery, with all its ramifications, was not however everywhere in operation. In an unsettled region, or in a newly-annexed one, the chief officer on the spot would proceed to collect revenue on his own initiative and deal with the situation as he thought best, in complete disregard of all elaborate parapharnalia. The usual machinery, in its entirety or in parts, might be introduced at once in such places. But oftener perhaps the officer and his men would remain content with collecting the dues from the farmers, the *chaudhuris* and the ryots with the solitary aid of the soldiers.

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A fact of special interest is that the *diwan* or *krori* in a particular locality might, and actually did, introduce changes in the revenue assessment of the *parganahs* under him apparently without any fresh inquiry. Charging the allowance of the *paiks* or archers to the rent-roll of the ryots, seems to have been a common form of extortion. It has to be added, however, that when such enhancements fomented serious discontent, the root of the trouble would be removed and the detested officer transferred to some other office.

The *mustajirs*, or revenue farmers, also enjoyed considerable independence in the matter of revenue collection. Deeds of acceptance were taken for the *parganahs* given to them. This practice surely implied that they undertook to pay specific sums to the government in accordance with the *tumar*, or some rough estimate, where the *tumar* was not available. Following such agreement, the *mustajirs* would take possession of the *parganahs* 'after making a slight increase in the rent,' and would also think 'of increasing it more for their own benefit and expense'. Since we may well assume that the amounts they agreed to pay to the government corresponded to the sums payable by the ryots on the basis of crop-estimates, such enhancements were only natural. It was even more natural that these fostered discontent. But nowhere do our sources refer to any governmental interference with the activities of the *mustajirs*. The discontent of the ryots of Jahangirabad, due to the tax enhancements for which the *mustajirs* were at least as much responsible as the *diwan*, led to the removal of the latter alone. Thus it would appear, that so long as the revenue-farmers paid the stipulated sum to the government, they were free to make as much money as they could at the cost of the ryot.

We may next consider the land-arrangements in the *jagirs* granted to the officers. Here, too, a distinction has to be made between the officers' personal *jagirs* and those granted for the maintenance of their soldiers or for such specific purposes as the upkeep of the flotilla (*nowara* lands). Nathan's father, for instance, received 22 *mahals* of Bhati and Ghoraghat as his personal *jagir*, and several *parganahs* of Orissa, Midnapore and Burdwan 'in lieu of the salaries of his men'. The latter were parcelled out among the soldiers and their officers and,

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apparently, were enjoyed as rent-free service tenures like the *paikan* lands of a later epoch. Special arrangements were made in the *parganahs* for the maintenance of the workers and officers of the fleet. The exact nature of these arrangements is not quite clear. It may however be assumed that parts of such lands were parcelled out among the workers and officers while in other parts direct collection of revenue was current.

The management of the personal *jagirs* was more complicated. Practically all the references to the topic in the earlier part of *Baharistan* mention arrangements for collection being made personally by the officer. Nathan's father, Ihtimam Khan, for instance, sent his personal assistant, Mohammad Murad, to make the necessary arrangements for his personal *jagir*. The latter 'appointed revenue collectors in different places', 'despatched two efficient regiments to two important places', and also instructed the latter 'to help the revenue collectors'. In the viceroyalty of Ibrahim Khan, Nathan similarly 'sent his *diwan* Ray Balabhadra Das in order to regulate the revenue and administrative affairs' of his *jagirs*. But in the latter part of *Baharistan*, particularly in the chapters dealing with the period of Shahjahan's usurpation, a different type of arrangement is mentioned. Even in the days of Ibrahim Khan, we find Nathan demanding the revenue of the *parganah* Khuntaghat, granted to him as his *jagir* in lieu of his services, from the provincial *diwan*. During Shahjahan's short-lived usurpation of power, Sher Khan Fath-Jang complained that he was not receiving his allowance from the *jagir* of Ghoraghat and was allowed to send hundred horsemen to help the revenue-officers in collecting revenue. At about the same time Nathan accepted the *jagir* of Tajpur-Purnea on condition that he would be allowed "to go there personally to punish the *zamindars* and to make them obedient". Evidently, all these instances refer to an arrangement whereby the collections in the *parganahs* assigned as *jagirs* to officers were made by government collectors and the income as estimated beforehand, made over to the officers concerned. If the officer concerned doubted the accuracy of the assessment, he might ask for a fresh inquiry. Any surplus apparently went to the government exchequer, being charged 'on the rent-roll'. Deficits of course had to be borne by the officers as their personal losses. One wonders

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whether this arrangement records a change which gradually came in or whether it was co-existent with the other system under which the officers themselves made arrangements for collection in their personal *jagirs*. A reference to grant of assignment on revenue of particular *parganahs* is, however, found as early as the days of Islam Khan, who granted Raja Pratapaditya "the revenue of the districts of Sripur and Bikrampur in lieu of his allowance". To be sure, the actual revenue-collection of these regions was not entrusted to Pratapaditya. But, then, no such arrangements are mentioned so early with reference to any imperial officer. In the later days an extremely complicated system was in vogue under which two sets of officials,—the *shiqdars* and *amlas* of the *jagirdars* and the government collectors,—operated in the same area, entailing endless sufferings on the people. The beginning of this oppressive system may be noted in some of the instances mentioned above. Another evil, mentioned as being much current in the later days, *viz.*, 'multiplicity of co-partners', first appear in the period under review. During Shahjahan's usurpation an officer was sent to secure some money from the *jagir* of Ghoraghat already assigned to another officer, Sher Khan Fath-Jang. The fact that the estates were scattered involved enormous cost in collection and thus proved to be extremely uneconomic. The frequent transfer of *jagirs* from one officer to another also entailed a great deal of suffering on the officers. In cases where the collections were made by the officers' own men, the transfers no doubt involved a certain amount of dislocation of the machinery of revenue collection, as one set of revenue staff was replaced by another on such occasions. In some cases, however, continuity of administration was maintained, at least parts of the father's *jagirs* being conferred on the son. Incidentally, the system of transfer detracted from the officer's interest in the welfare of the ryots, and collection of the maximum possible amount became inevitably their sole concern.

VIII. Revenue arrangements in the lands under the zamindars.

The *zamindars* enjoyed a tenure, much more stable than that of the officers' *jagirs*. Theoretically, from the viewpoint of

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land-revenue, the *zamindars* came to occupy the same position as the officers. For as vassals of the empire,—and often they were *mansabdars* as well,—their estates also were termed *jagirs* like the estates of the officers. Usually, when they accepted vassalage, their territories were given back to them as their *jagirs*, occasionally with some deductions. The analogy between the two types of tenure in our period practically ends there. Within their domains, the *zamindars* managed the revenue affairs just as they pleased, without any interference from the government. To the government the *zamindars* paid a *peshkash* or tribute, in cash and kind, the amount of which might have been fixed in some cases. In the *sarkar* Sulaimanabad, the *Ain* informs us, the receipts from independent *taluqdars* amounted to 213,067 dams. With this exception,—and whether the *Ain* really refers here to fixed cash demands is not certain,—*hast wa bud jama* or fixed cash demands are nowhere mentioned with reference to *zamindars* in our period. Nor, apparently, were the lands belonging to the *zamindars* assessed. They were, however, expected to be regular in the payment of their tribute.

A number of verses in Mukundurama's *Chandimangala* describing the settlement of Gujrat, the kingdom of the legendary hero Kalaketu, throw some light on the actual relationship between the tenant and the *zamindars*. From these it would appear that the actual tiller of the soil would have to pay the rent, not on the basis of the area of land he cultivated, but roughly according to the number of ploughs used for tilling it. These might have been, however, the case only in some instances. Precise demarcation of the plots of land seems to have been in vogue. The system of giving *patta* formally acknowledging the ryots' tenancy right, was also current, probably supplemented by the usual procedure of taking *qabuliyats* or deeds of agreement from the ryot in return. Often, to induce the prospective tenant, and perhaps also as an ordinary practice, loans would be advanced to the ryots, particularly in the form of such implements of agriculture as cattle and seeds. In these cases, the *zamindar* appeared in the role of money-lender or *mahajan*. One passage, it would seem, refers to the custom of granting sub-tenures. The Kayasthas who are described as having come to Kalaketu's kingdom,—'all educated men' and apparently not the actual tillers of the soil,—asked for

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agricultural loans and promised in return to settle with hundred thousand families of tenants. The passage can almost surely be taken to mean that certain classes of people settled their own tenants on lands taken from the *zamindars*, and that they constituted a rent-receiving interest.

Besides the main land-tax already mentioned, the *zamindars* levied numerous extra imposts. The practice of paying *bhet* or tribute, consisting usually in foodstuffs and such other things, must have been a very common one. The dealers in different articles would regularly present their wares to the *zamindar*. It may be assumed also, that the people of various professions given rent-free lands would have to pay back in terms of service. At the time of the first settlement, a lump sum, called *salami* had to be paid. Special dues were also payable at the time of ceremonies and festivals, under the general name of *parvani*. And besides, constant additions were apparently made to the burden of the poor tenant, particularly in the form of imposts in cash or kind on sales of such articles as betel-nut, salt and even rice or paddy. Besides the *zamindars*' men would habitually take without payment their '*tola*', i.e., share of the tenants' merchandise, from the local market. Even worse would be the lot of the ryot, when the *zamindar* appeared in the role of the ruthless money-lender. As already noted, advances were often made by the *zamindars* to promote cultivation. Often, again, it seems, the ryot would have to pay back with interest, and his crop might be seized as soon as the corn in the field was ready for harvest, lest the debtor-tenant should escape without paying. Even such natural calamities as flood, etc., with their disastrous effects on the standing crop, would not always secure remission of taxes, and dire punishments might befall the ryot in cases of failure to pay. But it may also be assumed that the '*te-sani inam*' or triennial remission mentioned so wistfully by Mukundarama, or at least remission for a more limited period, was occasionally granted by the *zamindar* in his own interest. For when oppression exceeded a certain limit, there was always the danger of the ryots running away to some other locality. The *zamindars*' self-interest, combined with a certain amount of lassitude inherent in *zamindari* administration, surely protected the ryot to some extent and relieved him from the rigours of punctual payment. Even in the estate of a landlord less noble

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than Kalaketu, the payment of the tenants' dues in instalments in course of three years, was not perhaps impossible.

IX. Rent-free lands.

We may now take note of the rent-free lands in passing. As previously mentioned, such lands might be found within all the three categories : the crownlands, the officers' *jagirs* and the *zamindars*' estates. At a later date the government grants were known as *badshahi* and the *zamindars*' grants as *'hukumi'*. This distinction in nomenclature might have existed even in our period. In all these cases again, the lands might be granted either as religious endowments or as service-tenures. The Muslim religious endowments in the crownlands known as *madad-i-maash* and *aima* were placed under the supervision of the provincial *sadr*. The stipends of the soldiers were granted in the form of land-allocations and these to be sure, were rent-free. The *Fathiyya* (*continuation*), however, mentions the grant of assignments on the revenue of particular *jagirs*, and not actual grants of land. Certain facts indicate that the government granted rent-free lands to the *zamindars* as well, in view of some particularly meritorious services. Correspondence dating back to the late 18th century, preserved in the Barisal district collectorate, mentions two types of rent-free tenures in the possession of some *zamindars*, called *nowara* and *hissajat* lands. The former is described as having been granted by the Mughal emperors for contribution of boats and men during the struggles with the Maghs and Firingis. The *hissajat* lands were granted as reward for the *zamindars*' personal participation in such campaigns. Since the struggle raged furiously in S. E. Bengal during the period under review, it may be supposed that some of these grants at least were made then.

Besides, there were the various rent-free tenures granted by the *zamindars* to some people for their religious merit (e.g. Brahmins and Vaishnavas) as also to certain occupational groups, who performed essential services. Among the occupational groups enjoying *inam* lands are mentioned fishermen, oil-manufacturers, mat-makers, *Bagdis*, tailors, carpenters, ferrymen, minstrels, milkmen, cobblers, weavers, *agradanis* and a number of others. But it does not seem very likely that

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all the members of these various groups were everywhere exempt from all types of payments.

X. Sair duties.

As to the *sair* duties, Grant in his *Political Survey* mentions seven types of imposts as being current in Bengal under Mughal rule. These are '*mahsool*' or 'customs in exports and imports' ; '*rahdarry*', an inland toll collected at road-side stations or *chowkis* 'on account of merchandise, grain and all the necessaries of life, carried to market' ; '*panderry*', i.e., tax on shops of workmen and retail merchants in towns, and temporary stalls at pilgrim fairs ; '*mholoreffa*', on artificers and manufacturers ; '*Ferroay Foujdarry*', i.e., 'produce of fines, confiscations' and, lastly, '*chout*, or fourth of the sums litigated in the civil courts', besides, *jiziya*, which was in abeyance throughout the empire in the days of Akbar and Jahangir. Grant's statements are corroborated directly or indirectly by our contemporary sources. Income from *sair* duties in one form or other is mentioned repeatedly in the statistics of the *sarkars* of the Bengal *subah*, as given in the *Ain*. Describing the condition of Bengal before Shaista Khan introduced his very necessary reforms, Shihabuddin Talish stated with regret: "From the first occupation of India and its ports by the Muhammadans to the end of Shah Jahan's reign, it was a rule and practice to exact *hasil* (custom) from every trader, from the rose-vendor down to the clay-vendor, from the weaver of fine linen to that of coarse cloth". In fact all 'artificers, tradesmen and new-comers (*Khush-nashin*, i.e., well-to-do)' were subject to it. Secondly, there were the house-taxes collected from new-comers and hucksters. Thirdly, the *zakat*, 1/40 of the income, was charged on travellers, merchants and stable-keepers. The *parganah* of Kora in *sarkar* Ghoraghat yielded 18,000 *dams* as *zakat* dues. Fourthly, the *rah-dari* became a great nuisance, at least towards the later part of Mughal rule. To quote once more the somewhat exaggerated words of Talish, "On the roads and ferries matters came to such a pass that no rider was allowed to go unless he paid a *dinar*, and no pedestrian unless he paid a *diram*. On the river highways, if the wind brought it to the ears of the toll-collectors (*rah-dars*) that the stream was carrying away a broken boat without paying *hasil*, they would

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chain the river. . . . They considered it an act of unparalleled leniency if no higher *zakat* was taken from rotten clothes actually worn than from mended rags, and a deed of extreme graciousness if cooked food was charged with a lower duty than uncooked grains". The shop dues and market dues are also mentioned in the *Ain* along with various types of *sair* duties levied on a variety of objects ranging from elephants and salt-pits to undried ginger. "Dues on produce and piscary of rivers, tanks, etc." mentioned in the *Ain*, also comes under this head. The impost on betel-nuts at Bakla yielded a considerable sum. At Dacca, Manrique found Rs. 4,000.00 being collected daily as dues from betel. Talish describes a despicable practice as having been long in existence in several parganahs: "When any man, ryot or newcomer, died without leaving any son, all his property including his wife and daughter was taken possession of by the department of the crownlands, or the *jagirdar* or *zamindar* who had such power and this custom was called *ankura* (-hooking)". The judicial system also gave much scope for extortion. The clerks of the *kotwali chabutara*, "in paying to the claimant his due," used to seize for the state one-fourth of it under the name of "fee for exertion." What is more curious and almost incredible, the plaintiff and the defendant were both 'kept in prison until the decision of their case', 'and their liberators (*itlaq-goian*) took daily fees from the prisoners and paid them into the state'. It is not certain, however, whether the two last mentioned practices can be traced back to our period. All these various imposts were in vogue in the officers' *jagirs* as well as in the crownlands. From the *jagir* of Shaista Khan alone 15 lakhs of rupees used to be collected as *hasil*. When to this formidable list we add those extra imposts mentioned in *Chandimangala*, Talish's statement that at last "tradesmen and merchants gave up their business, householders took to exile," hardly appears to be an exaggeration.

XI. The blessings of Mughal rule.

The extortionate character of some aspects of the revenue administration need not blind us to the very real benefits conferred by Mughal rule on the people of this province. After long years of bitter useless strife, Bengal by 1613 found peace in a comparative, if not in an absolute sense. This was the first

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and the most important gift of Mughal rule to Bengal. The province was now included into the general pattern of *Pax Mughalia* which already covered the greater part of India. Though the authority of the emperor in all its implications was not imposed on this province, central control was now firmly established. Within the framework of imperial government, the people were brought into a closer touch with North Indian life than they had been ever before. Within the country, the authority of a single political power was now acknowledged from one end to the other. For the common mass of men, it meant the end of the constant squabbles of the petty chiefs and the suffering they brought in their train. Politically, again, the country was firmly unified. The mighty arm of the Mughal emperor was extended to protect this outlying province from the recurrent invasions of the Maghs and the Portuguese. *Thanas* were set up at strategic points to minister to this particular need.

Mughal rule also brought to Bengal the blessings of a regularised administration. With its graded hierarchy and organisation into departments, the provincial administration of the Mughals brought the highest and the lowest in the land into close contact with the government. The *kotwali chabutaras*, set up even in the remote districts of the country, furthered the cause of peace and security. If an official proved oppressive, the people now had at least the right of appeal to the provincial authorities. The possibility of redress of grievances was also not entirely precluded.

In the wake of peace and regular administration, there came economic prosperity. By the end of Ibrahim Khan's viceroyalty, there was considerable improvement in the condition of agriculture, trade and industry. In the courts at Dacca and Agra, were found a new market for the costly fabrics of the Bengal looms. The textile industry was thus directly encouraged. The new peace naturally attracted to this rich province, traders whom the ceaseless strifes of the previous epoch had hitherto discouraged. As the political centre of gravity shifted to the marshy and riverine tracts of the south-east, the arteries of trade were revitalised up to their farthest point. Dacca developed as a great emporium of commerce, and by 1628, was in a state flourishing enough to draw homage from the pen of the much-

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travelled Manrique. Evidently, a new era was dawning in the history of Bengal.

XII. Drawbacks of Mughal rule in Bengal.

One must not however exaggerate the blessings of Mughal rule. For Bengal under the Mughals,—during the first half century in particular,—was surely no blissful Utopia where peace and prosperity alone reigned supreme. The history of this province between 1575 and 1594 is a sickening tale of recurrent rebellions and fruitless warfares. Ralph Fitch, who visited Bengal in 1587, referred to the troubled state of the land, infested with rebels. Even in 1597, the author of *Ain-i-Akbari* mentioned Isa Khan as the ruler of East Bengal, where the coinage and the *Khutba* were the only vestiges of imperial rule. Even as late as 1616, letters exchanged between Roe and Surat factors refer to the unsuitability of Bengal as a field for English commercial enterprise, partly because of the political insecurity. Even after Mughal authority was established more or less firmly, rebellions continued to occur from time to time almost to the end of our period. A close study of *Baharistan* reveals in gruesome details the full implication of all these wars and rebellions in the life of the common man. Plunder and rape appear as the invariable concomitants of these campaigns, and even a comparatively sensible man like Mirza Nathan boasts of his ruthless exploits. Udayaditya's failure to satisfy this officer's lust for gold drew upon the head of the Jessore people a terrible vengeance. He threatened to show "what is meant by looting" and true to his words, wrought such a havoc that he became "an object of great terror to the people of the country". Yet to be sure, Nathan was more humane than his brother Murad, who during the Jessore campaign brought as captives 4,000 women, old and young, stripped of all their clothes. The imperial armies, while operating in a rebel country, almost invariably took ryots captive and laid waste the cultivated lands with the object of weakening the enemy's war-effort. The weak and the innocent,—the ryots, the *beparis*, the poor pedestrian on his way to the market,—suffered heavily at the hands of both the parties and died in numbers. In a land where food as also all commodities in general were proverbially cheap, scarcity always followed in the wake of war and prices

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shot up sky high. The results are too obvious to require explanation. The expansion of the Mughal frontier brought forth new problems and involved the provincial administration in a prolonged warfare with the neighbouring kingdoms. The unhappy repurcussions of these wars on the life of the people,—specially on those living in the frontier regions,—were no doubt considerable.

The Magh and Firingi raids on the coastal districts,—and often further inland,—darkened still more the picture which was even otherwise none too bright. Despite the *thanas* set up by the Mughal authorities, the Magh raids desolated the entire tract from Chatgaon to Jagdia. Even such important places as Dacca, Bhulua, Sripur, Sondip, Jessore and Bhushana were not spared. The Mughal navy was too inefficient and Mughal rule too weak to prevent these depredations. The Maghs found a proper ally in the Firingi or Portuguese pirates and the two together wrought havoc on the hapless people of lower Bengal. The Firingis were strong enough to attack and kill at his own residence Daud Khan, the brother of Musa Khan Masnad-i-Ala. Fear of their raids induced Pratapaditya to submit to the Mughals. In the viceroyalty of Ibrahim Khan, the daily raids of the Firingis in Jessore assumed serious proportions and 1,500 men and women were taken away as captives in a very short time. There was 'neither any inhabited place, nor any traffic of merchants' on the route of Jessore, and few men except the Maghs and Firingis were familiar with the streams and *nalas* in this tract. The island of Sondip and parts of Bakla were in the possession of a Portuguese buccaneer for long. The Firingis shared their booty with the Maghs and carried on a brisk slave-trade with captives taken from Bengal. The Mughal officers at Tamluk would allow them to sell their captives at the harbour to prevent worse depredations. The Maghs preferred to employ their captives and settled many of them near Chittagong. Truly could the Firingis assert, "Our salary was the imperial domain. We considered the whole of Bengal as our *jagir*".

Even the piratical raids aside, the Mughal administration in Bengal was no picture of perfection. Imperial control over the province was hedged round by limitations. No messenger or letter could come from or go to Agra without the viceroy's knowledge, if he so wished. An imperial courier might be put

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to chains practically with immunity. Rebellion was also not precluded, though it was never so serious as to be uncontrollable. What affected the people of the province more directly were the elements of inefficiency in the provincial administration and official oppression. It was not always easy for the governor to assert his authority over the officers posted in outlying regions and the forms of defiance were many and curious. A petty *mansabdar* might rise in revolt, a *krori* refuse to yield up the revenue and a high imperial officer with all his followers might turn mendicant just to spite the governor. The jealousy between the imperial and provincial officers, the vexatious ever-recurring question of precedence as between fellow-officers, suspicions regarding the governor's *bona fides*,—all rendered the working of the administrative machinery a slow and irksome process. Within their *jagirs* or the territories in their charge, the officers acted as so many lordlings with little fear of interference. They might oppress the ryots, raise their dues and seize their beautiful boys and girls and for all that, merely stood the risk of being removed only if the consequent discontent assumed very serious proportions. The *Eastern Bengal Ballads* record the very common tradition regarding the seizure of ryots' wives and daughters by high officers and mention the professional *sindhukis* employed to secure such unsavoury booty. The life story of Mukundarama similarly illustrates the financial extortions of officers. To the oppression of the officers was added that of the clerks and it fell particularly heavily on the soldiery.

Even the peace and security characteristic of Mughal rule which might be considered some compensation for all this suffering, had obvious limitations. For as Pelsaert writing in the days of Jahangir put it, the emperor was the 'King of the plains or open roads only' and there were 'nearly as many rebels as subjects'. In many places one could 'travel only with a strong body of men, or on payment of heavy tolls'. If this was true of Upper India, it must have been more so of this outlying province.

The revenue administration also was none too well conducted. One prominent drawback it suffered from was its lack of uniformity. Within his *jagir* the officer was free to rack-rent the tenant without any let or hindrance. The system of escheat and frequent transfers of *jagir* must have made the officer parti-

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cularly indifferent to the lot of the ryot. *Mustajirs*, too, were free to enhance the assessment to their own benefit, and the system, as analysed above, made it practically inevitable that they should do so. Then there was the formidable list of *abwabs*, levied independently by the government, the officers and the *zamindars* in their respective domains, with its stultifying effects on trade and industry.

The *zamindars*, within their territories, were free to rule as they liked : free to rule, and free to oppress. The various forms of their oppression,—financial or otherwise,—have been noted above. It has been mentioned also that their mutual struggles were reduced in extent, but not entirely put to an end. Talish's verse,—'dark sigh of sufferers, in the heart of dark night',—not merely describes the sufferings of the oppressed *aimadars*, but pretty well sums up the whole situation.

XIII. Some aspects of Mughal rule in Bengal.

Certain claims are generally made in favour of Mughal rule in Bengal. Thus the Mughal conquest is said to have brought to an end the political isolation of this province. In so far as the restoration of Mughal power at Delhi in the person of Akbar and the subsequent continuation of Afghan rule in East India created a temporary barrier between the two regions, the assertion may be accepted as being correct. But in the days of Sher Shah and the Surs, Bengal formed a part of the Indian empire just as any other province. Even after the restoration of Mughal rule in India, Bengal was one of the seats of the Afghan power which continued to dominate Eastern India and not an entirely isolated unit. Again, in the previous epochs, Bengal had relation with other parts of Eastern India as between independent powers. In the realm of culture, she had influenced the literacy forms and religious thought of upper India in the pre-Mughal days.

We may be led to suppose that the unification of Bengal with the rest of India under the aegis of the Mughal emperor was all for the good. No doubt, the end of the internal strifes augured well for the province. But the fact remains that throughout our period, Mughal rule in Bengal preserved its character of a foreign conquest. The viceroys and officers came and went without taking any real interest in the life of the province. A

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considerable part of the resources of the land was drained away to Upper India in the form of presents or cash tributes. To the emperors, Bengal was merely a remote newly-conquered province which still remained to be pacified completely. Upper India for them had become very much their motherland. Bengal was never destined to become so. She remained throughout a 'hell full of bread', a place of exile for incompetent officers and, in the declining days of the grand empire, a milch cow to suckle the famished army and administration of the whole sub-continent.

One cannot accept without qualification either, the view that Mughal rule brought to an end the cultural poverty and political isolation of East Bengal. The rule of the *bhuiyas*, no doubt, had given that part of Bengal the character of a confederation of autonomous states and perhaps it was all for the good that this independence of doubtful value was brought to an end. But in the hey-day of the Sultanate period the two parts of Bengal were politically united. Nor was Eastern Bengal during the pre-Mughal days a mere cultural back-water where animism and the like alone flourished. Ever since the transfer of the Sena seat of power to Vikrampur, cultural traditions of orthodox Hinduism and the new social organisation based on Kulinism had found a fruitful soil in the riverine lands of the east and south-east. In this region the Sakta-Tantric cult which dominated mediaeval Bengali life had an unbroken tradition of centuries and particularly from the fifteenth century onwards produced a crop of holy men and scholars, of whom Sarvananda, Brahmananda and Purnananda are only the more famous ones. Their writings still exert considerable influence on Tantric thought and practice in both parts of Bengal. The ovation which Chaitanya received during his academic tour of Eastern Bengal affords further evidence of a living cultural tradition.

Mughal rule is also believed to have had a fostering influence on the European trade and the growth of neo-Vaishnavism. The former suggestion may be accepted in its entirety and one may even go a little further on this point. The growth of European trade was not merely related to the peace and centralisation which followed in the wake of Mughal rule ; the Mughal Government took active steps to encourage it from the very beginning.

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In 1576, the initial Mughal conquest of Bengal was achieved. Perhaps in the same year the Portuguese founded Hugli under the authority of Akbar's *farman*. Since then throughout our period the Mughals adopted an actively favourable attitude to European trade.

The relation between Mughal rule and the growth of Bengal Vaishnavism is less obvious. If in a more troubled period, the Master and his followers could carry their message to the remotest parts of India, it is as likely that the return journey of the faith from Vrindavana in its transformed shape would also have been possible without the aid of *Pax Mughalia*. But *Pax Mughalia* no doubt sheltered the path along which the disciples of the *gosvamins* came to Bengal with the works of their masters in a sealed chest. But for *Pax Mughalia*, perhaps, more than one Bir Bhan would have plundered the poor anchorites and the masters' works got lost beyond redemption. Perhaps, again, in such a contingency, the Navadwipa school of Bengal Vaishnavism would have got a chance and a little more of the revolutionary potentials of the Chaitanya movement come to fruition. Surely then, Mughal rule contributed indirectly to the organisation of Bengal Vaishnavas into a sect. The path to Vrindavana lay open,—and the path to Puri. Along these two paths the new sect grew apace. Whether it was all for the good is another question.

Finally, Mughal rule is supposed to have fostered an over-all renaissance in Bengal's life. This question will be discussed fully later on in this work. Here it may merely be pointed out that the vernacular literature of the period, deprived of the sustenance of royal patronage, lacked the vigour and spontaneity of the earlier epochs. Krishnadasa Kaviraja, Kasirama Dasa and Mukundarama, the only outstanding products of the age, are men of the old rather than the new epoch, judged by the generation they belong to. But for their works, the sickening fertility of the literature of the period has little striking to offer. Far away in Arakan under royal patronage local poets were experimenting on a new literary form in Bengali. But Mughal rule had little to do with that. The heavy classical scholarship which often acts as a drag on the poetic inspiration of this age might have been partly the product of the greater economic security which certain classes now came to enjoy. But its merit,

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too, like that of most other features of this period, is rather questionable.

Looking for the positive benefits conferred by Mughal rule on Bengal during the period under review, we may seize finally upon two points: first, centralised administration and its consequence,—peace ; secondly, the beginnings of European trade and the new wealth which it brought in its train. As to the first, if we may put it somewhat paradoxically, the qualitative change was profound, but the quantitative one far less so. In other words, the character of the government was fundamentally changed, but the result of this change, assessed in terms of human happiness and suffering, was far less striking than it might have been. As to the second, it has to be noted that this development was only partly due to the policy of the government and, to a far greater degree, the result of forces operating from beyond the seas. Besides, the encouragement to foreign traders for love of immediate gain in the shape of higher income from tariff undermined an alternative possibility, viz., the growth of a native over-seas trade under government patronage.

Appendix A

Views of Grant and Moreland on revenue administration in Bengal under the Mughals.

Due to the paucity of the available data, the discussion on Bengal's revenue history of the Mughal period, particularly its earlier part, have so long been more or less perfunctory. However, two notable attempts have been made so far in this direction. In the 18th century, Grant produced his two exhaustive, but often undependable, works: '*Political Survey of the Northern Circars*' (written in 1784) and '*A Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Finances in Bengal*'. In the present century, W.H. Moreland published "*The Agrarian System of Muslim India*" (Delhi, 1968), of which work one section is devoted to the revenue history of Bengal. The papers on which Grant's studies were based were 'chiefly contained in about twenty volumes of Persian *ferds*, or account of revenue, prior to the era of the *dewanny* . . . . entirely produced through the influence of a light and private purse,' in Hyderabad. As the

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sources of Grant's information are no longer traceable, it is difficult to pass any accurate judgment on his work. It is, however, surprising that a study of the contemporary sources now available go to prove that Grant's analysis is very often correct in matters of detail, though his general thesis is fundamentally wrong. This anomaly may be explained with reference to the fact that Grant "described Murshid Quli's methods with substantial accuracy", but erroneously supposed that Murshid Quli's system was the same as Todar Mal's and that there had been no change in the intervening period. Hence, as in fact many of the details of Murshid Quli's revenue administration were similar to those of the period under review, Grant's statements on such matters are now found to be true. The 'mahl' (*mal*), i.e., territorial income, in the days of Murshid Quli, as also throughout the entire period of Mughal rule in Bengal, according to Grant, was 'generally considered under the denomination and common idea of a land-tax imposed on certain classes of native and hereditary proprietors called *zamindars'*. Further, "about the year 1582, the revenue-demand on the peasants was fixed in detail by Todar Mal at figures representing one-fourth of the average produce . . . . collections were made according to it by *zamindars*, who were annual contracting farmers, with stated allowances by way of commission, and small estates, their entire legitimate receipts never exceeding ten per cent of the demand". Grant, however, mentioned as items of lesser importance the lands immediately dependent on *khalsa sharifa* (royal exchequer),—"including the capital town, with its dependent *circar* . . . . and the principal *parganah* or district of all other *circars*, under the subordinate rule of *nabobs*, *foujdars* or *aumils*", parcelled out into revenue divisions under *kroris* with a 5% commission,—and the *jagirs* assigned to officers for maintenance of troops and personal dignities, 'by a feudal temporary tenure'. It is significant, however, that though Grant describes the land-tax imposed on the *zamindars* as the main territorial income of the government, 'the Reserved area . . . . . on Grant's figures, considerably exceeded the area given in assignment'.

Moreland, in his chapter on the revenue history of Bengal, pointed out the basic errors of Grant's thesis and suggested some necessary amendments. For our present purpose, we

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need take note of a few points raised by him. In the first place, he pointed out that the statistics given in the *Ain*, for Bengal in particular, represent 'valuation, not Demand,' to which, however, the demand might have approximated in the later days. Secondly, the state-demand in Bengal, as the testimony of the *Ain* clearly proves, were fixed by estimate, not assessment'. We may further add that for our period the idea that the territorial income was conceived mainly as an impost on *zamindars* is basically incorrect. Moreland provisionally suggested that, "when Bengal was annexed by Akbar, there were some chiefs, and some old-established Farmers, ... both classes paying fixed sums by way of Demand ; and that, apart from the areas so held, the officials or assignees dealt with the villages either through Farmers or through the headmen". Gradually, "the officials came . . . . to occupy the position of Farmers, paying the amount of the Valuation, and making what they could. As time went on, the distinction between Chiefs, Farmers and Officials disappeared, because there was in fact no difference in the incidence of the various positions, and all alike came to be known as *zamindars*."

Before putting forward the objections to Moreland's hypothesis, it is only fair to take note of the fact that he offered it, 'not as fact established by evidence, but as tentative inference, to be confirmed or modified in the light of further knowledge'. Such further knowledge is now available in the copious references to revenue administration contained in the *Baharistan* and the *Fathiyya*, which were not utilised by Moreland.

Moreland's suggestion that the chiefs, like the farmers, paid 'fixed sums by way of demand', cannot be accepted in view of the fact that our sources throughout the period speak of '*peshkash*', not '*hastbud jama*', with reference to the chiefs. In making it, Moreland fell into the same error as Grant, of equating the system prevalent in a much later epoch with that in an earlier one. Secondly, it is not correct to hold that the officers or assignees in all cases dealt with the ryots through farmers or headmen. The lands assigned to farmers or *Mustajirs*, were clearly distinguished from such parts of the *khalisa* or crown-lands where officers collected revenue through their own men or those appointed by provincial authorities. The *jagirdars*, too, we are told, made arrangements for collec-

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tion through their own men. As to the transformation of the officers into farmers, the beginning of the process may be noted in our period ; but still many decades were to pass before all who paid revenue to the government came to be known by the general name of *zamindar*. And, finally, in our period at least, there were major differences 'in the incidence of the various positions' as the above reference to the position of the chiefs alone will prove.

NOTES ON AUTHORITIES

N.B. *In these Notes, reference is made by means of key-words or names of authors, which are printed in italics. The full titles etc. of these works are given in the Bibliography.*

SECTION I. The resumé of the political history of Bengal, 1575-1627, is based mainly on the *History of Bengal*, chapters X-XVI. For the original sources of information, see *Bibliography* of the same work. In writing this section, I have consulted chiefly the *Akbarnama* and the *Baharistan*.

SECTION III. The best authority for the different facets of the administration in Bengal in this period is the *Baharistan* which contains numerous incidental, and hence very dependable, references to the subject. The account given in the present work has been reconstructed by piecing together this scattered information and by adding to it some materials available elsewhere. The following references are to the *Baharistan*, except where otherwise indicated. The English translation of *Baharistan* has been referred to as *tr.*

For rules for the succession of viceroys and their dismissal, see 141a-141b, 197a-197b; *tr.*, I. 211, 257. For *peshkash* and booty see 106b, 156b-157a, 160b-161a, 264b, 271a-271b; *tr.*, I, 224, 299, 310 and II., 608-9, 628-29; also *History of Bengal*, 218, 314. For *waqai-navis* see 101a; *tr.*, I, 209. For *diwan's* power, see 183a, 187a; *tr* , I, 377, 388. For the *mansabdars'* attitude see 105b; *tr.*, I, 220-21. For imperial intervention, see 2b, 29b, 103a, 140a-140b, 160a-160b; *tr.*, I, 4, 5, 73-74, 213-14, 254, 308-'10; also *Tuzuk*, I, 205. For inspections, punishment of officers, and consequent fear see 103a, 146a, 151b, 197b, 219b, 264a; *tr.*, I, 99, 214-15, 271-72, 287, 420; II, 476, 606. For the system of escheat, see 97b, 156b-157a; *tr.*, I, 207, 299. For reference to Husain Shah as *padshah*, see *Chaitanya-charitamrita, madhya-lila*, 19.

SECTION IV. For the *faujdar*, see 56a; *tr.*, I, 139; also *Ain*, II, 41-42. For *sardar*, see 272b, 273a, 274a; *tr.*, II, 633, 635, 637-38. Regarding wardens of strategic places, the *Baharistan* uses no specific appellation, but refers somewhat vaguely to *Khidmat dar band-i-garhi'arf rajmahal wa Akbarnagar*. For the vesting of several offices in one person, see 146b, 152a, 187a, 273a; *tr.*, I, 272, 289, 388; II, 635. For the registration of sales by the *qazi*, see 64a; *tr.*, I, 163. For the *subahdar's* theoretical position, see *Ain*, II, 37.

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V. For the power of officers administering newly conquered territories, see 56a, 57b, 76a, 98a, 146b, 174b, 180a-180b, 273a; *tr.*, I, 139, 199, 207-8, 273, 274, 353, 368-69; II, 635. For viceregal control, see 105a, 146a-147b, 156a, 269a; *tr.*, I, 220, 271-72, 274-76, 296-97; II, 622; also *Manrique*, I, 23-24.

SECTION VI. For the antiquity of some of the *zamindar* families see *Medinipurer Itihasa*, 498-99, 504-33; *Maymansimher Varendra Brahmana Jamidar*; and *History of Backergunge*. For the *zamindars*' status, see *Baharistan* 56a; *tr.*, I, 139; *Medinipurer Itihasa*, 156-57. For the administration of their territories, see *Baharistan*, 53a, 75b-76a, 98a; *tr.*, I, 132, 197-98, 207-8. For the rise of new petty *zamindars*, see *Medinipurer Itihasa*, 113, 127-28; *Vikrampurer Itihasa*, 509. For the *zamindars*' relations with the imperial power, see *Medinipurer Itihasa*, 188; *Annual Report, Regional Records Survey Committee, Bengal and Assam*, 1947-'48 (Secretary's Report); also *Maymansimher Varendra Brahmana Jamidar*, II; *Gaurer Itihasa*, II; article on Some Old Documents in Barisal, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, December, 1948. For instances of governmental interference, see *Medinipurer Itihasa*, 183-84; *Jessore District Gazetteer*, 35. For the *zamindars*' powers and functions within their estates, see Grant's *Survey*, 30; Westland's *Jessore*, 51-52; also Mukundarama's account of Bankura Ray in *Chandimangala*, 7. The original Persian letters in the possession of the Shushang Raj family mentioned in the text are reported to be in the Mymensingh Court of Wards office at present and no longer accessible to the public. The present author consulted some certified Bengali translations of these letters which were submitted as exhibits in a law-suit and the authenticity of which were admitted by the government. These are now in the possession of Maharaja Bhupendranarayan Sinha of Shushang. For the instances of *zamindars*' oppression and their lawless activities see *Vikrampurer Itihasa*, 128-29; *Medinipurer Itihasa*, 501-2; the accounts of brigandage organised by Bir Hamir and Chand Ray in *Premavilasa; Baharistan*, 284a; tr., II, 665.

VII. For general account of Revenue administration in Bengal, see *Ain*, II, 134. For half-yearly collections, see 325b; *tr.*, II, 779-80. For survey and measurement, see 311b-312a; *tr.*, II, 742; *Chandimangala*, 7. For administration of *Khalisa* lands, see 146b, 152a, 156b-157a; 160b-161a, 325b; *tr.*, I, 272-3, 289, 299, 310; II, 779. For the details of methods of collection, see 57b, 61b, 146b, 152a, 192a, 270a, 284b, 311b; *tr.*, I, 144, 156-7, 272, 289, 403; II, 625, 667, 742. For *Kroris*, see 146b, 152a, 171a, 174b; *tr.*, I, 272-3, 289, 342, 353. For the sub-ordinate revenue staff see 53a, 61b, 174b; tr., I, 132, 157, 353. For soldiers' participation in revenue collection see 4b; tr., I, 12-13. For checking of accounts and inspection parties see 311b, 325a; *tr.*, II, 741-2, 778-9. For stop-gap arrangements in newly conquered areas, see 146b, 174b, 270a; *tr.*, I, 273, 353; II, 625. For transfer of oppressive officers, see 152a, 180b-181a, *tr.*, I, 288-9, 369-70. For arrangements in the officers' *jagirs*, see 4b, 9b, 15b, 284b, 286b, 324b, 325b; *tr.*, I, 12-13, 29, 43; II, 667, 673, 776-7, 779-80; *Fathiyya* (continuation), 117a-117b; *J. A. S. B.*, 1906, 260.

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VIII. For cash receipts from *zamindars*, see *Ain*, II, 154. For land and revenue arrangements in territories under the chiefs, see *Chandimangala*, 100-107.

IX. For *hissajat* and *nowara* lands, see article on Some Old Documents in Barisal, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 1948. For various types of rent-free tenures, see the chapters on land revenue in the *Bengal District Gazetteers*; also *Chandimangala*, 101, 105.

X. For the seven types of imposts mentioned by Grant see his *Political Survey*, 28-29; also *Ain*, II, 143, 144, 147, 151, 152. For Talish's account of the various imposts, see *Fathiyya* (continuation), 123b-124a, 128a-129a, 131b; *J.A.S.B.*, 1906, 263-4, 266; 1907, 423. For dues from betel, see *Manrique*, I, 45.

XI. For the commercial prosperity of Dacca, see *Manrique*, I, 44-8.

XII. For the troubled state of Bengal, see *Early Travels*, 18; *Roe*, 193n; *Letters Received*, IV, 315. For the reference to Isa Khan as ruler of East Bengal, see *Ain*, II, 130. For sufferings of the people during campaigns, see 1b, 39a, 48b, 50b, 52b, 55a, 57a, 66b, 110b, 184b, etc.; *tr.*, I, 94, 118, 124-5, 130-31, 138, 142, 171, 231, 381 etc. For scarcity caused by war, see 41b, 272b; *tr.*, I, 99; II, 683. For Magh and Firingi depredations, see 36a, 54b, 58b, 273a-273b; *tr.*, I, 85-6, 136-7, 146; II, 635-6; *Fathiyya* (continuation), 107b-108a, 123a-125a, 164b-165a; *J.A.S.B.*, 1907, 419-25. For the limitations of imperial control, see 53a, 106b; *tr.*, I, 132, 224; *Pelsaert*, 58-9, For the limitations of viceregal authority, see 38a-39b, 59b-60a, 308a; *tr.*, I, 92-6, 105; II, 443. For mutual jealousies of officers, see 29a-29b, 48a-48b, 49b-50a, 214a, etc.; *tr.*, I, 71-3, 115-17, 121-22; II, 461, etc. For oppression of *ryots*, see 146b-147b, 219b, etc.; *tr.*, I, 273-76; II, 476; autobiographical sketch of poet Mukundarama in *Chandimangala*.

Appendix A. For Grant's views on land revenue in Bengal under the Mughals, see his *Analysis*, 29-30, 32-33, 172. For Moreland's views, see his *Agrarian system*, 194-9 and Appendix G. For the elaboration of the arguments put forward in criticism of their views, see the sections on revenue administration in the present work.

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CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF THE EUROPEANS

I. Portuguese activities in Bengal : a resumé.

A leading factor in the evolution of Bengal's society and economy during Mughal rule was the activities of the different European nations. Up to the year 1627 only three of them had appeared on the scene,—the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English,—and only one nation, viz. the Portuguese, played an important part.

As early as 1514, the Portuguese settled in Pipli in Orissa and they visited the emporium of Hijli in the Midnapore district soon afterwards. In 1517 D. Joao de Silveira, the commander of the first regular Portuguese expedition to Chittagong, embarked at that port as the ambassador to Arakan. His efforts to secure permission to erect a factory proved fruitless, but thenceforward a Portuguese ship with merchandise was sent to Bengal every year and Nuno da Cunha, the governor of Goa, persistently sought to secure a foot-hold in and open trade with the country. In 1535 Diego Rebello, the factor of Coromandel pearl fisheries, came to Satgaon in his own armed vessels and was strong enough to forbid two Arab ships to carry on trade. The next year proved a landmark in the history of the Portuguese in Bengal. For in that year Mahmud Shah allowed Martim Affonso de Mello to build factories in Chittagong and Satgaon and also offered them the custom-houses of the two ports. Nuno Farnandes Freire was appointed the chief of the custom house of Chittagong with grants of land and the power to realise rent from the native residents. The custom house at Satgaon went to Joao Correa, but the establishment at this place does not seem to have prospered.

It was the neighbouring port of Hugli, originally an insignificant village, that became the chief centre of Portuguese

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activity in the *subah* of Bengal. The port, Manrique informs us, was founded by some Portuguese traders who came from various parts of India to buy and sell and had large *golas* or store-houses for that purpose. In the beginning they wintered here for 5 to 6 months and, some years later, prolonged their stay. In the year 1579-80, Pedro Tavares founded the settlement of Hugli, under the authority of a *farman* from Akbar. The settlement grew rapidly and with it the trade and influence of the Portuguese in Bengal. In 1588 Fitch found the whole town of Hugli in Portuguese hands. Cabral described it as a common emporium of Indian and inter-Asiatic trade. In 1597 the *Ain-i-Akbari* noted the inclusion of Satgaon as well within the fold of Portuguese authority. The rich citizens bought islands and properties along the river banks.

All the time a crop of Portuguese settlements were growing up in various parts of Bengal. Hijli, Sripur, Dacca, Chandikan, Katrabhu and numerous other places in the Midnapore, Dacca, Jessore, Barisal and Noakhali districts became the scenes of intense commercial activity of the Portuguese. Chittagong, the Porto Grando, became a vast centre of trade and definitely passed into Portuguese hands by 1590. Dianga, a neighbouring place, became another stronghold. Carvalho and Manoel de Mattos brought the strategic island of Sondip under the authority of the Portuguese in 1602. Sometime after 1605 Sebastiao Gonsalves Tibau established his independent authority in that island and added the territories of Dakshin Shahabazpur and Patelbhanga in the *sarkar* Bakla to his short-lived kingdom.

The high water-mark of Portuguese expansion in Bengal may be said to have been reached now. Towards the end of the 16th century the bulk of Bengal's oversea trade had passed into their hands. At Hugli, they ruled in practical independence subject only to the nominal authority of the Portuguese home government and their representatives at Ceylon. Chittagong enjoyed a similar status. Sondip was the seat of an independent Portuguese power. The adventurous, less inclined to settled ways of life, took to piracy, harassing the coastal districts and often moving even far inland. In the wake of political and commercial power came the Catholic missionaries and they established churches in such widely scattered places as Hijli, Banja, Hugli, Bandel, Sripur, Chandikan, Chittagong etc. Their proselytizing activities

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met with practically no resistance from the local authorities.

But then came a period of set-back. By the time when the Portuguese trade was firmly established in Bengal, the general decline in their power all over Asia had already set in. The Dutch had appeared in the Indian seas as a formidable rival and the English were soon to follow. Within Bengal, adverse political circumstances added to their misfortunes. In 1607, the Arakan King massacred their settlement at Dianga. Soon after, the king of Chandikan treacherously killed Carvalho and started a persecution of the Christians. In 1616 Gonslaves' short-lived reign in Sondip was put to an end by the Magh King. In 1632 Hugli, the great centre of Portuguese activity in Bengal, fell before the imperial army of Shahjahan. In other parts of the country,—in Chittagong in particular,—the Portuguese traders and pirates, missionaries and clergymen long continued to be active even after the fall of the Porto Grando during Shayesta Khan's administration. But the fall of Hugli really marked the end of their commercial supremacy in the coast and water-ways of Bengal. Their subsequent activities were of little significance in the larger life of the country.

II. Beginnings of Dutch trade with Bengal.

Another nation which first appeared in Bengal during our period was the Dutch. The early history of Dutch trade in Bengal is still very obscure. As early as 1607, however, a letter written to the English East India Company by Gabriel Towerson, a servant of the Company, refers to the Dutch in connection with Bengal trade. "Between Point de Galle and Colombo", wrote Towerson, "they (a Dutch ship) took a small ship of Bengala, out of which they took 7 packs of cloth". The activity here referred to is obviously piratical, but it indicates clearly enough the growing strength of the Dutch in the Bay. Another letter written by a servant of the Company in 1610 discusses the relations between Bengal and the Indies. It mentions various types of 'excellent fine cloth' manufactured in Bengal as being 'very vendible in all parts of Sumatra, Java, Moluccus. . . .' Nutmegs, cloves, and maces brought by European merchants from the Indies, on the other hand, sold 'exceeding well' in the port of Satgaon. From the same region, the European merchants also brought for sale in Bengal various

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other commodities such as pepper, gold, benjamin, camphor, pitch, saltpetre and 'great quantity of Brimstone'. The Dutch by the 'twenties of the 17th century had already secured a dominant position in the East Indies, and the Portuguese battle for the command of the Indian waters with their newly arrived rivals was already a losing one. So one may presume without any risk of grave error that in this commercial relation between Bengal and the Indies, carried on mainly through European agency, the Dutch played at least an indirect part. In 1615, the Arakan king is said to have forced some Dutch ships in the harbour to help him against the Portuguese. By that time the Dutch had become quite frequent visitors to the coast of the Bay. ". . . . Upon the sea coaste, where there is any hope of benefit," the Surat factors regretfully informed Sir Thomas Roe in reply to his query regarding the prospects of trade in Bengal, "the Dutch and the Portingales have trade". The commercial activities of this nation along the coast of Bengal seem to have gone on uninterrupted. In December 1622 the Masulipatam factors were expecting a Dutch ship, Schidam, 'with purchase from the coast of Bengal'. Again in 1623, the Dutch, oppressed by the ruler of Golconda, attended "deley the cominge of a shippe and two friggatts from the coast of Bengala". By 1625 a further step forward was apparently taken. For near about that year, according to a common tradition, the Dutch established their first factory in Bengal in the town of Chinsura, a few miles off the Portuguese settlement of Hugli. Thus by the end of Jahangir's reign the Dutch had already secured a position of some importance in Bengal's trade and also perhaps a sound footing on her soil.

III. Bengal's first contacts with the English.

But by 1627, and even by 1632, the English could make little headway in their effort to open up trade with Bengal. Their attitude throughout this period was diffident and uncertain, and at the most they only enquired about the prospects of trade with this distant and outlying province of the empire of the Grand Mogor. When in the eighties of the 16th centuries Ralph Fitch, the first English visitor to Bengal, came to this country, he must have considered the place hardly congenial for English trade. He found the country infested by rebels to whom the numerous

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rivers and islands of Bengal offered safe shelter. Trade, both inland and overseas, was no doubt flourishing. But the Portuguese with their firm footings at Hugli, Satgaon, Chittagong and a number of other places, were in so complete and confident a control of this trade that they could easily afford to receive and show around a visitor from another European country without any fear or suspicion. Besides, the 'right way' from Hindustan to Bengal was full of thieves, so that Fitch had to follow a path which lay through dense wilderness. Finch, writing at about the same time, draws an equally unattractive picture wherein the rebellious Bengal chiefs and 'the Portugall out-laws . . . . living in no form of subjection to God or man' feature prominently.

In the early years of the next century, however, the English traders and factors in India showed an increasing awareness of the commercial 'goings on' in that far off province. The various types of Bengal cloth—'Tzinde, Patta, Sallalo, Bastan, Kassa' and the like—occur repeatedly in their letters. They knew too where these articles were in demand as also what commodities from the Indies could be sold in Bengal. Still, more than two decades were to pass before direct trade with Bengal could be opened. But commodities, both raw and manufactured, produced in Bengal soon featured in the list of purchases of the English factories in such distant places as Surat, Ajmere and Masulipatam. Peter Floris writing to Thomas Aldworth in 1614 speaks familiarly of 'fine Bengal cloth' as being less profitable than coarse cloth and yarn. Thomas Keridge, writing from Ajmere in the same year, tells us that vermilion selling at Rs. 290 per maund was often brought from Bengal at cheaper rates. In a letter written the following year he mentions again a number of articles,—lead, tin, elephant's teeth, quick silver etc.,—'brought usually from Bengala', which sold best at Gujarat, apparently through agencies, both Indian and English.

The year 1616 is an important land-mark in the history of Bengal's relation with the English. For in that year was the idea of direct trade with Bengal first definitely mooted. Joseph Salbank, writing from Agra, suggested that some of the Company's servants should "discover all the parts of this country" including 'Bengala' 'for the vent of our commodities'. The

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same year Roe wrote to the Surat factors in even clearer terms that an attempt should be made to open an overland trade with Bengal. But Keridge in his reply argued about Bengal being a 'whott country', its inhabitants mostly 'very poore Gentiles', and its sea coast controlled by the Dutch and the Portuguese, so that, he felt, 'the transportation by land thither', would be 'more hazardous than the benefit by the sale of a small quantity can answer'. Roe, however, was not convinced. He saw no reason why Bengal so rich in wheat, rice, sugar, fine cloth, musk, civit, amber and the like, should be poor. Further, as he shrewdly observed, "The number of Portugalls residing is a good argument for us to seek it; it is a signe ther is good doing. . . ." His ideas on the future relations with the Portuguese were also very clear: "It is to be understood wee must fire them out and mayntayne our trade at the pikes end."

The Surat factors continued to be sceptical and in a letter written in July, 1616 they set forth in detail their own point of view. "We deny not", it ran, "but that Bengalla bring wheat, rice and sugar to Indya, makes fine cloths, etc., which showeth the fertility of the country and the quality of the inhabitants, who, being tillers of the earth and tradesmen, by their sales in India reap the fruit of their labour and sustain life, and some no doubt get wealthy by merchandising. Yet it followeth not that cloth will therefore sell, which in those countries is spent in quantities by princes and gentry only. Of the first there is none, and of the latter very few. We acknowledge transportation by water thither is cheap ; yet we think it were better to rot in Agmere, ... than after expense of time and moneys to return it thither to no other purpose". Roe still persisted. The project, however, had to be put off that year as small shipping drawing little water necessary for making a 'trial of Port Pequeno for the sitting of a factory',—an advance on the first idea of merely opening trade,— was not available.

It is interesting to note that by the end of the year the ambassador himself was won over to the side of the Surat factors. Writing to the Directors of the Company at home on December 1, 1616 he opposed the idea of founding a factory in Bengal. "Whereas you write for new factories, except the silk of Bengala require it", the letter ran, "I am of opinion your

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residences are sufficient". A letter addressed to Roe from the Surat factors, written a few days later, pointed out anew the unsuitability of Porto Pequeno as a port for the English, specially as the Portuguese had "a city on that part of Ganges and with their boats command the river". The growing pessimism regarding the prospects of trade with Bengal is reflected clearly in Roe's letter to the Company in February, 1617. "Bengala hath no ports", wrote he, "but such as the Portugalls possesse, for small shipping. It will vent nothing of yours. The people are unwilling in respect of the warr (as they suppose) like to ensue in their seas ; and the Prince hath crossed it, thinking wee desired to remove thither wholly, and that, if wee stay in India, hee takes to bee an affront". About the same time Lucas Antheunis cautiously advocated preliminary enquiries before Roe took definite steps "to provide for the coasts of Bengala the same privileges" as for the rest of India.

But despite the many discouraging circumstances and the inscrutability of the ways of the Mughal court, there was one particular factor which must have roused new hopes in the hearts of the English in India. At about this time the power of the Portuguese was everywhere on the decline and this fact is noted repeatedly in the letters of the English factors. During the latter part of 1617 Roe made desperate efforts to secure *farmans* for Bengal and other places, but only met with repeated failures. A growing sense of the importance of the trade with Bengal,—the marked contrast with the previous indifference,—is evident in some letters of this time. "If aney innovation or hopes of trade to Bengala shall occuere", wrote William Methwold from Masulipatam to Roe, "it cannot but bee somewhat helpeful to our proceedings."

The years 1618-'21 saw the first notable effort made by the English to open trade with Bengal. Hughes and Parker, two servants of the company, were sent to Patna on a prospecting mission to investigate into the possibilities of silk-trade with Bengal. At Patna Hughes found large quantities of raw silk brought in coccoon from Bengal, purchased a stock and set a staff to reel it off into suitable skeins. But the wastage and cost of transport to Agra rendered the purchase of raw silk at Patna unprofitable. Besides, the patterns of silk (some of which were also sent by Francis Fettiplace in December, 1618)

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procured from Bengal were judged unfavourably. The suggestion of Hughes and Parker to the effect that Murshidabad silk should be purchased, was not heeded. Hughes continued to be of opinion that the purchase of Bengal silk at Patna would prove very profitable and as late as August, 1621 he and Parker were directed to purchase 100 maunds of Bengal silk till at last orders from the home authorities put an end to the project.

According to an agreement between the English and the Emperor Jahangir concluded on November 10, 1623 the English were granted the right of free trade throughout the Mughal empire including Bengal. By the terms of this agreement they were "permitted free trade as well in the ports of Surratt, Cambaya, Goga, Sinda and Bengala, as in all other cities and places within the dominions of Jangere Paudshah, without prohibition of any comoditie to bee brought in or exported out of the Kingdom, neither limitation confininge them either unto places, times or quantities. . . ." A second agreement with the Surat authorities regarding free trade followed in 1624. But then ensued a period of political troubles chiefly centring round Masulipatam which dashed the hopes roused by the agreements of the preceding years. It culminated in the temporary withdrawal of the English in 1628. Only in 1631 and 1632 were the attempts to open trade with Bengal revived in earnest.

The reasons for this long delay have been explained with admirable clarity by Sir W. Foster: "The goods sought by the English merchants on the coast were chiefly the calicoes of Golconda and the Hindu countries to the southwards ; . . . . the products of Bengal were readily obtainable at Masulipatam, and there was no temptation to venture further afield in quest of them, at the risk of being snapped by the Portuguese warvessels ; moreover, the troubles at Masulipatam, culminating in the withdrawal of the English in 1628, had effectually stopped for a time any schemes they may have entertained for the enlargement of their commerce".

The earliest phase in the history of Bengal's relation with the English had no immediate bearing on the life of the people. But it marked the beginning of an important development. The diffident gropings of the English for a commercial gateway to

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Bengal during the first three decades of the 17th century,—their proposals and arguments, their mission and its failure, the *farmans* and their withdrawal,—thus assume a considerable significance in the history of the province. If the years 1570 to 1627 were for Bengal primarily a period of seed-time rather than one of fruition, here to be sure was being sown the most fruitful seed of all.

IV. Growth and pattern of Portuguese trade with Bengal.

Between 1575 and 1627, the activities of the Portuguese,—and to a lesser extent, of the Dutch—produced more immediate results. During this epoch the Portuguese trade was perhaps the most notable feature in the development of Bengal's economy. As early as 1537 the Portuguese had founded trading settlements and secured independent custom-houses in Chittagong and Satgaon. Our knowledge of Portuguese commercial activities in Bengal in the pre-Mughal period is unfortunately meagre. Cesar Federici, the Venetian merchant, who visited these places in 1567 gives us an impression of the nature of the Portuguese trade. In West Bengal, Satgaon was the great entrepôt, "where the Merchants gather themselves together with their trade". Every year the Portuguese ships sailed up the Ganges, the bigger ones being laden at Betor and the smaller ones at Satgaon. A temporary mart,—"a village with Houses and shops made of straw, and with all things necessary to their uses",—was set up at Betor to cater to the needs of the Portuguese traders and burnt down on their departure. At Satgaon every year "they laid thirtie or five and thirtie ships great and small, with Rice, Cloth of Bombast of diverse sorts, Lacca, great abundance of sugar, Mirabolans dried and preserved, long Pepper, Oyle of Zerzeline, and many other sorts of merchandise". From Chittagong, the Portuguese purchased in quantities rice, bombast cloth, sugar and corn. The East Indies were the destination of this varied cargo. Cesar Federici in his account of the Portuguese trade in Bengal nowhere mentions either any selling activities or even temporary entrepôts of the Portuguese for trading purposes. One wonders whether this evidence of silence implies that the settlements at Chittagong and Satgaon established near about 1537 had either disappeared or failed to develop as trading centres.

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The foundation of Hugli, however, marks the beginning of a fresh development in the Portuguese commercial activities in Bengal. The settlement was started as a merely temporary resort with a number of large store-houses set up by Portuguese traders who came from different parts of India to buy and sell. First, they wintered here for 5 or 6 months, but later "stayed one or two years at a stretch", seeing the advantages of this trade. Manrique gives a detailed account of the wares which the Portuguese at Hugli sold 'at high prices'. The bulk of these commodities came from the 'south', i.e., the East Indies. From Solor and Timor came red and white sandal-wood ; from Malacca and Banda, clove, nutmeg and mace ; from Borneo, precious camphor ; from China, great quantities of porcelain and various gilt articles, e.g., bedstead, tables, boxes, chests, writing-desks and various curios, as also pearls and jewels set in European style ; from south India, 'a large amount of worked silks'. Then there came cowries or shells from Maldives, conch-shells from Tinnevelley coast, pepper from Malabar and cinnamon from Ceylon ; the last two had to be smuggled in, their export being prohibited by His Portuguese Majesty because they were royal monopolies. The people who purchased these commodities were the '*Sodagores*' or the merchants of the country. These merchants carried the articles brought by the Portuguese from all over Asia to upper India, "to the court of Agra" in particular.

Bengal's export trade during the period was largely in Portuguese hands, though Indian merchants played second fiddle as middlemen. When Emperor Akbar first enquired about the Portuguese in Bengal, his messenger came only to find that they had already sailed away at the end of their hibernating season. But they had left behind more than two *lacs* of rupees in the hands of a number of native merchants for the purchase of various merchandise which they would collect on their return next year. Cotton goods, ginghams of grass, silk, sugar, *ghi*, rice, indigo, long pepper, salt-petre, wax, lac, rich back-stitched quilts, bed-hangings, pavillions and various curios were among the products which chiefly interested them. Later ships from Portuguese India, Negapatam, Sumatra, Malacca and other places came every year to Hijli to take rice, cotton, sugar, long pepper and butter from there to Portuguese India. Presently

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Hugli became a permanent resort with elaborate establishments, as also the chief centre of Bengal's trade.

A period of rapid expansion followed in course of which the Portuguese extended their activities to all the important trading centres of Bengal, including Dacca, and even captured a part of Bengal's trade with upper India at least as far as Patna to which place they went with goods manufactured in Bengal or brought to her ports by their ships from other parts of Asia and purchased from there 'course carpets of Junapoore, ambertyes, cassaes and some silke' and in fact bought up "all they can laye hand of".

Thus at the height of their power the Portuguese exercised a manifold control on Bengal's commerce. They now enjoyed a practically unqualified monopoly of Bengal's sea-borne trade,—both export and import. They maintained this monopoly, first, through their possession of such important trading centres as Hugli, Satgaon and Chittagong and the partial control over lesser ports like Hijli and their numerous establishments strewn through Bengal. The shipping being mostly in their hands, they succeeded easily in directing the sea-borne trade to their trading centres in Bengal, particularly Hugli. The monopoly was maintained also by a second and less innocuous method, viz., the destruction of such audacious foreign vessels as might attempt its infringement in any way. Native boats were indeed not spared. The English factory records refer to the destruction of a fleet of native boats bringing carpets from Bengal for sale at Masulipatam, and also to the uncertainty of the said port's silk-trade with Bengal in about 1621 as no merchants were coming for some years and the Portuguese had seized the cargo in 1620. In many cases mere orders forbidding trade, backed as they were by the superior armed might of the Portuguese vessels, must have sufficed rendering any actual destruction unnecessary.

But this monopoly had certain limitations, perhaps to some extent self-imposed. In 1602 Pyrard de Laval saw in the Maldives many Bengali merchants purchasing the *cowries* and coir-products found in abundance there. At least in the early years of the 17th century, Bengali traders carried silk and carpets to the eastern coast of the Deccan. A traveller in 1599 even referred to a Bengali trading settlement at Achin. Besides

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the Bengalis, there were the Hindustanis, the Mughals, the Persians and the Armenians who came to fetch goods at Hugli and the merchants who carried Bengal *Muslins*, mainly from Dacca, to Khurasan, Persia, Turkey and such other places. But the activities of such traders seem to have been confined mainly to the land-route.

There are two factors which may explain the continued infringement of the Portuguese monopoly of Bengal's sea-trade, despite their naval superiority. In the first place, strong as the Portuguese were at sea, they were not strong enough to entirely wipe out all their rivals, specially in the earlier part of their trading career. Their success in this direction grew in proportion to their strength. Laval noted the busy activities of the Bengali merchants in the Maldives in 1602, but by 1621 the Masulipatam factors were despairing of any further arrival of native fleets with Bengal silk or carpets due to the Portuguese depredations. Secondly, the native trade seems to have been tolerated by them to some extent obviously in their own interest. With some of the native traders at least their relation seems to have been one of the commercial alliance in one form or other. One would not wonder if the system of permits or licences introduced in India's western waters by the Portuguese and other nations was also in vogue in the east. There are definite evidences to show that some time after Jahangir's reign the English, the Dutch and the Danes introduced this profitable and pernicious custom in some parts of the Bay. Some years before the Mughal conquest of Bengal, the Portuguese of Goa entered into a treaty with the Raja of Bakla whereby, among other things, the Raja was given four *cartazes* or passports with which four of his ships could freely navigate the Indian Ocean. In the early years of Shahjahan's reign, Manrique met in Midnapore a certain merchant, 'Mobato Khan', who transacted a large volume of trade with 'India'. At Pipli in Orissa, again, he found a big new ship belonging to a *shiqdar* being sent to Cochin with varied merchandise under the command of a noble Portuguese, Teotonio Viegas. But altogether the volume of trade carried on by non-Portuguese shipping was hardly considerable. As early as 1597, the *sair* duties from Bandarban and Mandawi in *sarkar* Satgaon,—only about two decades after the foundation of Hugli,—were estimated at 1200000 *dams* or

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Rs. 30,000, obviously a result of the flourishing Portuguese trade. This was a record with which the other trading communities had nothing to compare. This monopolistic trade was mainly intra-Asiatic. Ships came from the various Portuguese settlements in different parts of Asia as far as Macao in China with local products—mainly spices, minerals, Burmese jewels and Chinese manufactured goods. European manufactures which came regularly to Portuguese India might also have found their way to Bengal in Portuguese vessels, at least for the purpose of presentation to grandees and the men who mattered. On the return voyage the ships carried as their cargo mainly the celebrated Bengal textiles and silks and various food-stuffs and sold them at enormous profit. The Bengal textiles, as Linschoten reports, reached even Portugal. The commodities thus exported were secured mainly through the middlemen and also from the *hats* or temporary markets set up (as at Betor) by the native merchants to supply the in-coming ships. One may also guess that the Portuguese in their later days went "up and down the river of Ganges to Faires buying their commodities with a great advantage" like the native traders described by Cesar Federici. Just as the Portuguese from other parts of Asia came to Bengal to sell their purchases from elsewhere and to take back Bengal goods for sale all over Asia, the Portuguese of Bengal also went out regularly in their ships to Burma, the Indies and Portuguese India and brought back enormous profits as also the various commodities 'very vendible' in Bengal, the sale of which to native merchants and courts added further to their opulence. Ceylon, and apparently also Goa, received regular supplies of food-stuffs from Bengal.

In the internal and overland trade of Bengal, merchants of India and the Asian countries to the west continued to play a prominent part without any serious opposition from the Portuguese. The latter, however, encouraged and made their settlements the seat of various types of manufactures,—dresses, textiles and delicacies for the palate in the main. The trading in salt,—then said to have been rare in Bengal,—was practically their monopoly, yielding enormous profit. Sondwip and Hijli were the chief centres for this trade. The traders from Hindustan, Persia and Central Asia flocked to the Portuguese settlements to buy the imported as well as the local products.

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The Portuguese domination of the overland trade extended as far as Patna, as the Englishman Hughes noted regretfully in his letters.

V. Pattern of Dutch trade with Bengal

By the second decade of the 17th century, the Dutch appeared as formidable rivals of the Portuguese and made serious inroads on the latter's monopoly of Bengal's sea-trade. Their manner of trading was in many ways similar to that of the Portuguese, though there were some important differences. Their trade also was mainly intra-Asian, but not entirely so. In the thirties of the 17th century, there would always be a few Dutch ships in Bengal, trading 'from port to port all the yeare long, sometimes buying rice and other provisions' where they were cheap and transporting these to better markets. Such ships would carry their wares to other parts of Asia and India, and from there would often sail for Holland. Streynsham Master, writing in 1675, stated that the Dutch trade in Bengal and other parts of India was financed partly from Europe. But gold and copper from Japan, tin, brass and ivory from Malay, spices and shells from the southern seas comprised the main stock-in-trade in exchange of which the Dutch secured cotton cloth, silk, sail-cloth, hemp and cordage, rice, opium, sugar, pepper, vegetable dyes, saltpetre etc. for sending home. By the last quarter of the 17th century the European market had thus definitely become one of the chief destinations of the Dutch trade in Bengal and other parts of India. In the earlier part of the century also the beginning of this tendency is clearly noticeable, though in the main the Dutch were then satisfied with carrying their merchandise from port to port along the coast. The Portuguese, in the earlier part of their trading career in Asia, had looked to the European market as the ultimate destination of their eastern trade. But by the time they came to play a prominent role in Bengal's economy, they had found the intra-Asian trade to be profitable enough, and from the view-point of the history of this province their trade with Europe was hardly of much consequence. The Dutch trade, on the contrary, seems never to have lost contact with Europe, though intra-Asian commerce was always one of its most important elements.

Another notable difference consisted in the fact that till the very end of Jahangir's reign, even after the probable establish-

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ment of the Chinsura factory, the Dutch trade with Bengal was mainly coastal. The reasons are not far to seek. The Portuguese were already losing their naval supremacy by the beginning of the 17th century. But they were still solidly entrenched in the ports of Hugli and Chittagong and in effective control of Bengal's chief internal trade-routes, the river Ganges and its tributaries. And the people, as Roe noted, were not very favourable to the idea of letting any other European nation come to their soil for trade, lest war should break out. So at least till the fall of Hugli the Dutch had to confine their activities mainly to the coast.

Streynsham Master noted in his days a further peculiarity of Dutch trade in India, particularly in the south: "Their way of trading here is upon credit, so that at present they owe some hundred thousands of *pagodas* in this country for which they do not pay interest, but the men to whom they owe it are the merchants of whome they buy their goods and in recompense for the interest, they overrate their goods from 30 to 50 per cent and more, the interest of this country being 24 per cent per annum. And when their ships bring gold from the south seas, they coyne .... and send part hither but never soe much as to clear their debts." Here again was a system which offered a contrast to that of the Portuguese. For the latter were in the habit of advancing money to middlemen and later collecting their goods, specially in the early part of their trading career. But we do not know if the Dutch had developed such a system in Bengal as early as our period, though a beginning in this direction even at that time does not seem very improbable.

VI. The results of European commercial activities.

The people who gained most from the European commercial activities in Bengal were of course the Europeans themselves. Bowrey, writing in the days of the decline of the Portuguese power, described the opulence which had survived the political storms. Master, in describing the wide extent and large-scale organisation of Dutch trade, wrote with obvious jealousy. To all this prosperity of the contemporary and a later epoch, Bengal of the early Mughal era had contributed a great deal. But what was a gain for the Europeans was in many ways a loss for Bengal. The control of Bengal's sea-trade now passed

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almost entirely out of the hands of the Indian traders to be monopolised, first, by the Portuguese and later to some extent by the Dutch as well.

A compensatory factor was the enormous increase in the volume of trade. The Portuguese and the Dutch with their superior shipping could carry the wares of Bengal to the farthest corners of Asia and even to Europe, and bring back the products of those regions at a speed much higher than the best Asian crafts could have attained. Their control of the East Indies and the South Seas hastened the pace of this growth. One particular aspect of this development was the expansion of the market for Bengal goods. The Portuguese opened and widened the gate to the Asian market in the main, while some at least of Bengal's products trickled into Portugal through traders who visited Portuguese India or came from there. But even in this period, the wider market of Europe was being slowly opened by the Dutch ships and frigates which touched at Bengal's coast and sailed on to Holland via other parts of India and Africa. What was more, the nation which was destined to reshape Bengal's economy, was already looking for a gateway into the province. The notes from the authorities at home, the eager queries of the Batavia council regarding Bengal '*muga*',—all indicate the growing demand for Bengal products and the appreciation of the advantages of trade with Bengal. Thus by 1627 the window to the west was already opened and the circumstances which would open it yet wider were also taking shape.

Through this open window poured in a steady shower of gold, the volume of which is to be estimated, in the absence of more accurate statistics, in terms of the 30,000 rupees of *sair* duties payable at *sarkar* Satgaon alone and the daily custom dues of 4,000 rupees paid at Dacca for one single item,—betel. With gold came the seekers after it. To Hugli flocked the merchants of many nations,—Khurasanis, Mughals, Persians, Armenians, Hindustanis and the like,—to share in her new prosperity and carry thence the products of Bengal and Eastern Asia to upper India and regions further west. The markets of Dacca, the new capital, were also buzzing with the brisk activities of the many foreign and native traders. Their gains from this growing trade was no doubt considerable. Fitch mentioned the immense

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wealth of the merchants of Sonargaon and Nathan could raise a loan of hundred thousand rupees at a few days' notice from the merchant-princes of Dacca. Among the sharers in this new opulence one must count the middlemen to whom the Portuguese advanced money for purchases, the '*sodagores*', foreign and native, who carried to the court of Agra the rich wares imported from abroad and Manrique's '*Cataris*',—Kshetris in more common parlance,—who were the richest people in Dacca, their adopted home. Of the local people, these middlemen and merchants, many of whom came from outside Bengal, benefited most from the European trade.

The common folk were, however, not entirely deprived. Along the river Ganges, in the small but important territory directly under the Portuguese, there developed a flourishing colony. The native, as much as the foreigner, shared in its prosperity. Besides fostering the general demand for Bengal's products abroad, the Portuguese provided direct encouragement to her cotton, silk and certain minor industries by helping these develop in the territory occupied by them. They also made interesting additions by introducing the manufacture of certain food-stuffs like cheese, pickles, condiments etc.

A development of far greater significance was the importance which now accrued to certain regions comparatively insignificant earlier and the shifting of the centre of economic gravity to these places. Hijli and Chittagong, Sondwip and Sripur gained new importance and Dacca owed her prosperity not a little to the Portuguese. The silting of a river might have been primarily responsible for the decline of Satgaon. But the new port of Hugli, as the Padshahnama noted quite correctly, stole away much of the trade of the older *Porto Pequeno* and became the chief trading emporium in Bengal. The ships of the Portuguese trailing along the Ganges past Betor and Sutanati chalked out the path which the greater commerce of the Dutch and the English were to follow in future. They also thus marked out the region which was destined to become the centre of Bengal's economic life and eventually of her political life as well. "It is under their commercial supremacy", wrote Wilson in assessing the indebtedness of the English to the Portuguese, "that the place which we know by the name of Calcutta first began to have any importance; it is to them that we are chiefly

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indebted for our first reliable information about Hugli and its markets."

VII. Portuguese settlements,—a barrier to Mughal centralisation.

Trade was the most important, but surely not the only form of activity of the Europeans in the early phase of their relation with Bengal. One of the strongest barriers that beat back the rising tide of Mughal centralisation in Bengal, was the Portuguese settlements which maintained their virtual independence to the very end of Jahangir's reign. Even the mere territorial extent of these settlements was considerable and the extent of their power was greater than that of their territory. They occupied the entire tract from Hugli to Satgaon and individual citizens bought up properties along both sides of the river. They lived in the completest form of independence in this region. The Mughals, satisfied with the revenues of the market and the customs, left the immediate government to the Portuguese, who elected annually a *Capitan Convidor* and four assistants, in accordance with the orders of the Spanish king. Even the Viceroy at Goa had no power over them and the fleet of the viceroy of Bengal himself, while entering the Hugli, would have to submit to certain formalities. With their boats they commanded the river Hugli itself. Power generated arrogance and, we are told, that at the time of Shahjahan's accession they did not even send the customary marks of submission. The prolonged resistance they offered to the imperial army is a further evidence of their strength. Of the other tracts, the very important port of Chittagong, the neighbouring settlement of Dianga and, for a long time, the island of Sondwip with its dependencies were also the seats of different Portuguese communities whose practical independence was often crowned with *de jure* authority acquired through feat of arms. After the conquest of Sondwip, they even planned to hold the east coast of the Bay with Chittagong and Pegu as bases. The numerous minor settlements in different parts of Bengal were also in all probability free from encroachments on part of the local authorities. For the military might of the Europeans and their trade, which was a source of considerable profit to the government, were sure to act as guarantee for their

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extra-territorial rights. Fortunately for the Mughals, the scattered settlements of the Portuguese in Bengal obeyed no single authority, nor formed parts of any common organisation. Had such been the case, the establishment of Mughal authority in Bengal might have proved a more difficult task, and the Portuguese India on the western coast might still have a counterpart in the east along the river Hugli and the shores of the Bay.

VIII. Portuguese pirates,— a menace to Mughal peace.

The Portuguese harassed the Mughal authorities in Bengal in more than one way. The activities of the Portuguese pirates and buccaneers, assisted ably by their Magh allies, constituted a perpetual threat to the life and security of the Bengali people throughout our period and even after the fall of Chittagong during Shaista Khan's viceroyalty. Almost in the very beginning of their career in Bengal, the lawless spirit of this Latin people found expression in the destruction of a Persian galleot in the port of Chittagong itself (1526). The author of this crime was Ruy Vas de Pereira, an accredited representative of the government. When individual buccaneers, responsible to nobody, took up this task of ravage and plunder, it naturally assumed serious proportions. Fitch and Finch spoke of the terror unleashed by the Portuguese outlaws in the concluding years of the 16th century. In course of the following decade piracy in the coasts and waterways of Bengal developed as a lucrative and regular profession. Apparently any one who found even the very lax discipline of Bengal's Portuguese settlements rather irksome for his buoyant spirit, had recourse to this attractive mode of living. One Portuguese commander, Barbosa, quarrelled with his fellow officers, went on to settle at Hangarkhali and from there regularly ravaged the coastal districts of Bengal. Persons of better position soon flocked to serve under him.

A modern apologist suggests in an indirect way that the corrupting influence of the Magh King was largely responsible for the worst depredations committed by the Portuguese. But such an apology underestimates rather unduly the evil potentialities of that militant people. The career of Sebastiao Gonsalves Tibau clearly indicates the early beginning of piracy

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as a regular profession among the Portuguese in Bengal. He came to India as a soldier, took to trade and after his escape from the massacre of Dianga, settled in the islands at the mouth of the Ganges as a full-fledged pirate, finally ending as the pirate-king of Sondwip. He gave this profession a new impetus though, no doubt, it reached its climax under the aegis of the Magh King. The latter resettled the Portuguese at Dianga after 1615, took them into his service and "with their conjoined efforts brought to a culmination an age of plunder and piracy". By the end of our period, the Dutch, too, were pillaging ships from Bengal in the Bay. They, however, did not emulate the example of their predecessors on the soil of the province.

To-day one may visualise with precision the effects of these ravages on the life of Bengal. Peace and security, for one thing, were constantly in danger, particularly in the south-eastern districts. ". . . . The Firingis of the *Harmad*, ...never ceased even in time of peace to attack and plunder the territory of Jessore . . . ." Daud Khan, the brother of Musa Khan Masnad-i-Ala, tried to check their depredations and in consequence was killed in his own house by the pirates who escaped with impunity. More than once, they sailed up to the suburbs of Dacca itself and ravaged the neighbouring villages. They abetted the Magh attack on Madaxa, i.e., Murshidabad. In fact, the 'Portuguese leaders' went out annually on "filibustering slave-trading expeditions against the Mughals of Bengal.' The Portuguese in Arakan service continually raided this unhappy province,—usually three to four times a year, not counting the minor raids. In fact they were authorised to ravage Bengal by the provincial Council at Goa which considered these ravages a just act, because the Mughals were held to be the enemies of Christianity.

Perhaps the most obnoxious activity of these pirates.—if one can at all make such an invidious distinction,—was their slave trade, in which the more peaceful settlers also participated. A graphic picture of this gruesome trade has been preserved in the detailed account of Shihabuddin Talish. The extent of the ravage caused by it may be gauged from the fact that between 1621 and 1624, the Portuguese brought to Chittagong alone 42,000 slaves from the various districts of Bengal. The settlers at Hugli regularly bought these slaves from the Maghs and so

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did the Portuguese at Tamluk. It is a significant fact that at the time of the fall of Hugli the bulk of its defenders consisted of slaves. Shahjahan accused the Portuguese at Hugli of selling Bengali prisoners to the Maghs for their galleys. The slaves purchased at Chittagong and Dianga were sent to different parts of India by Indian and Portuguese dealers. The beautiful slaves seen by Pyrard de Laval at Goa's markets, brought "from all countries of India", included not a few from Bengal. The ship taking Manrique from Pipli to 'India' carried 80 slaves.

The effects of these regular raids and slave-trading activities may still be seen in more than one sphere of Bengali life. The forest which skirts the southern shores of Bengal owes its growth, as is well-known, not a little to this particular industry of the Portuguese, though perhaps popular opinion has erred on the side of exaggeration on this point. We have it, however, on the more dependable authority of Manrique, that the once flourishing island of Sagaur was destroyed by the Portuguese and the Maghs. The caste-histories of east and south-east Bengal also tell us of many families who lost their caste through the unholy touch of the Firingi or the Magh. These depredations, as noted elsewhere in this work, also contributed to the decline of the native sea-trade. A favourite method of the Portuguese pirates,—to capture ships and hold them to ransom,—accelerated that process.

IX. Miscellaneous activities of the Portuguese.

In the early Mughal period, the Portuguese also played a prominent part in Bengal's history as mercenaries and officers in the local armies and thus anticipated the activities of the European military adventurers of a later date. Among them were famous figures like Domingo Carvalho and lesser men like Salvador Dantes in the service of the Masnad-i-Ala of Hijli, Fernando Lopes Pereira, appointed Captain of the port of Pipli by order of the Nawab of Dacca, and the Portuguese captain serving the Raja of Sripur, to name only a few. At Sripur, in fact, there was a whole contingent of Portuguese soldiers, though perhaps not very numerous. The Governor of Dacca also had under him a number of Portuguese captains who might not be excommunicated without his permission. The king of Arakan, as noted before, took the entire settlement

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of Dianga into his service and gave them lands for their sustenance. A Portuguese captain piloted the ship of a *shiqdar* of Pipli out on a commercial venture. Taken together, the Portuguese mercenaries must have constituted a fairly numerous community, imparting to the armies and fleets of Bengal a little of their superior skill in military and naval affairs.

More adept in commerce and the art of war the Portuguese who came to Bengal were not entirely ignorant of the nobler arts of peace. True, the activities of the Portuguese missionaries affected but little the life of the Bengali people. But at times at least they brought to the path of God many of their fellow countrymen, who in their more usual moments, lived under "no form of subjection to God or man". According to Nicolas Pimenta, Domingo de Souza and Francisco Fernandes who went to Hugli in 1598, "reformed the courses of many which lived in Piracie, and loose lusts". They also performed a similar salutary task at Chandikan, "where they stayed a moneth to reforme disorders by Lusts and Discord". Fr. Melechoir Fonseca found in Bakla a settlement not visited by any priests for long and sought to reform them by his preachings. Judging from results, such wholesome efforts of the missionaries were hardly very successful. But if by their activities they could in the very least reform the ways of even some of their barbarous compatriots, then surely they deserved the gratitude of the people of Bengal.

The Portuguese also started certain types of development work. They added to the list of Bengal's agri-horticultural products many new items,—pine-apple, cashew-nuts and the like. At Hugli they built an alms-house, the Casa de Misericordia, the first of its kind in Bengal. They also built the first hospitals, in the modern sense of the term. They started the first missionary schools and sent Bengali students to the Jesuit College at Goa. What is more important, Domingo de Souza translated into the 'Bengalan Language', "a tractate of Christian Religion, in which were confuted the Gentile and Mahumetan errours : to which was added a short Catechisme by way of Dialogue". This work, "the children frequenting the schoole learned by heart, and taught the servants in their families". The far-reaching influence of

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Portuguese on the Bengali language is a common knowledge to-day. What is less known is the fact that at one time Portuguese became almost the lingua franca of Bengal's coastal regions and was learnt by not a few of the Indians in this province. 'Mobato Khan'. a Muslim merchant of Midnapore, spoke to Manrique in Portuguese. The Negroes in the service of the Raja of Sripur conversed in it. "Even as late as 1828 the Governor of Serampore received the daily report of his little garrison of thirty sepoys from the commandant, a native of Oudh, in Portuguese".

In the early days of Mughal rule in Bengal, the Portuguese anticipated in various ways the manifold part which Europeans were later destined to play in the history of the province. In this period they and the Dutch first brought to the doors of Bengal the fruits of the new trade with Asia and Europe. The proud settlements of Hugli and Chittagong, defiant in their independence, pointed to the way along which Chandernagore and Calcutta were to develop later. The Portuguese mercenaries in the pay of the *subahdar* and the Rajas appear as the true predecessors of the Europeans in the army of the Bengal Nawab. The missionaries and the clever agriculturist anticipated, though but crudely and feebly, the activities of Carey and Hare on the one hand and the development works of the British Indian Government on the other. If in this pleasant picture the pirates and buccaneers seem to strike a jarring note, let us remember the Company's servants in private trade and the gentlemen who shook the Pagoda tree after Plassey and the analogy will be almost perfect.

NOTES ON AUTHORITIES

I. For a detailed history of the Portuguese in Bengal, see *Campos;* also the chapter on this topic in *History of Bengal*. A description of the Portuguese settlements in Bengal by an Augustinian monk dated 1699 was found in the Goa archives, it has been published (in translation) in *Bengal : Past and Present*, 1952. For the history of Hugli, see *Manrique*, I, 27-9; also *Elliot and Dowson*, VII, 31ff (*Padshahnama*).

II. For the beginnings of Dutch trade with Bengal, see *Letters Received*, 1602-13, 9, 74-6; IV, 315; *Roe*, 193; *Factory Records*, 1622-23, 178, 317; *Bowrey*, 170; *Hugli District Gazetteer*, 56; *Stewart*, 138-9; Orme's *History of Hindostan*, II, 8.

III. For Fitch's account of the state of law and order in Bengal and the position of the Portuguese, see *Early Travels*, 5-6, 18, 24-6, 28, 34; also

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181 for similar description by Finch. For references to raw materials and manufactures from Bengal in English Records, see *Letters Received*, I, 69-70, 72, 74, 76, 255; II, 59, 181; III, 66. For discussions regarding the opening of direct trade with Bengal, *ibid.*, IV, 66, 250, 315, 327, 342-43; V, 173; *Roe*, 193, 434; *Factory Records*, 1618-21, 14, 49-50. For the prospecting mission of Hughes and Parker, see *Travels of Peter Mundy*, Appendix D, 360-73; also *Factory Records*, 1618-21, xxiii-xxiv, 46, 52, 193, 197, 205, 260, 317. For Jahangir's *farman* of 1623, *ibid.*, 309; for the agreement with Surat authorities, *ibid*, 27. For the reasons of the delay in the renewed attempt to open trade with Bengal, *ibid*, 1630-33, Introduction, XXX.

IV. For the Portuguese settlement in Satgaon and Cesar Federici's account of their trade, see *Purchas*, X, 113-14, 138. For their independent custom houses, see *Campos*, 113. For Hugli and its trade, see references in Section I; also *Manrique*, I, 27-31 and *Early Travels*, 26. For the expansion of Portuguese trade and the commodities in which they traded, see *Manrique*, I, 27-36; Mr. Campos' chapter on the subject; also the relevant factory records mentioned in the notes on Section III; *Factory Records*, 1618-21, 195, 197 and *Early Travels*, 182. For the methods by which the Portuguese tried to maintain their monopoly, see *Factory Records*, 1618-21, 254n, 264; 1630-33, XXX; *Campos*, 37. For the activities of the Bengali traders, see *Purchas*, II, 315; IX, 560; *Manrique*, I, 428, 441. For other Asian traders, see *Manrique*, I, 56-7, 438; Cabral's letter in *Manrique*, II, 392; *Bowrey*, 192; *Bernier*, 310. For the system of licences introduced by European traders see *Wilson*, I, 9 (extract from W. Bruton's *Voyage* to *Bengala*, 1638). For the treaty between the Bakla Raja and the Goa authorities, see Sen, *Report on the Historical Records at Goa*, 4. For *sair* duties from *sarkar* Satgaon, see *Ain*, II, 154. For the intra-Asiatic trade of the Portuguese, see *Pelsaert*, 8-9; *Pyrard*, II, 211, 212; *Roe*, 308; *Bowrey*, 133-34; *Linschoten*, I, 96; *Purchas*, X, 114, 136; *Early Travels*, 44; *Letters Received*, IV, 34.

V. For English accounts of the nature of Dutch trade in Bengal, see *Hedges' Diary*, III, 179; *Master*, I, 141, 297. For comparison between the volume of Dutch and Portuguese trade, see *McPherson*, 45, 47-8. For the local people's early objection to non-Portuguese European traders, see *Factory Records*, 1618-21, 14.

VI. For the wealth of the merchants of Dacca and Sonargaon, see *Early Travels*, 28; *Baharistan*, 276b; *tr.*, II. 644; *Manrique* I, 31, 33, 44.

VII. For the power and position of the Portuguese settlement of Hugli see *Manrique*, II, 316, 393, (Cabral's letter); *Elliot and Dowson*, VII, 31-32 (*Padshahnama*), *Roe*, 309n. For Portuguese ambitions regarding the east coast of the Bay, see *Campos*, 71.

VIII. For the destruction of a Persian galleot by the Portuguese at Chittagong, see *Campos*, 30-31. For Portuguese piratical activities and slave trade, see *Early Travels*, 25, 182; *Manrique*, I, 92, 285-86, 304, 442, 445; II, 315, 323, 400, (Cabral's letter); *Baharistan*, 36a, 54b; *tr.*, I, 85-6, 136-37; *Fathiyya* (continuation), 122b, 123a, 123b; *J.A.S.B.*, 1907, 422; *Bernier*,

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239; *Campos*, 78, 81, 105; D. C. Bhattacharya, "*Vangalay Magh dauratmyer vivarana*" in *Prabasi*, 1353, B.S.

IX. For the Portuguese mercenaries in the employ of local chiefs, see *Manrique*, I, 437, 443; II, 311, 393 (Cabral's letter); *Purchas*, X, 206 (Pimenta's letter). For the activities of the Portuguese missionaries see, *Dujarric*, IV, 826-34; *Purchas*, X, 205 (Pimenta's letter). For the spread of the Portuguese language, see *Manrique*, I, 420-21; *Hugli District Gazetteer*, 55-6.

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CHAPTER III

THE NEO-VAISHNAVA MOVEMENT

I. Stages in the growth of the Chaitanya movement.

In the early years of the sixteenth century the movement inspired by Chaitanya unleashed new forces in the social and religious life of Bengal. As the movement passed through certain stages of evolution, these new forces also underwent a corresponding change in character. In the earlier part of Mughal rule in Bengal, Neo-Vaishnavism may be said to have reached a final form. It was in this finalised form that the Chaitanya cult exercised an enduring influence on Bengali life.

(*i*) *Early development in Bengal: deviations and divergent elements.*

In the earliest phase of the Post-Chaitanya Vaishnava movement in Bengal two distinct trends developed simultaneously at Navadvipa and Vrindavana. The ideas and outlook of the Navadvipa followers are reflected in the lyrical writings of our earliest authorities—Murari Gupta, Kavikarnapura, Narahari Sarkar and the like. Their vague ecstatic outbursts of adoration show no signs of even a beginning of an organised system. Adoration of Chaitanya as the highest and ultimate object of worship was the dominant note of their works. To that was added the belief that he was the incarnation of Krishna and Radha at the same time. In the writings of Kavikarnapura, the ecstatically emotional form of devotion ('*raganuga bhakti*') was distinguished clearly from the devotion which follows the way of scriptural injunctions ('*vaidhi bhakti*') and the former was definitely exalted over the latter. It was further asserted that the prime motive for Krishna's descent as Chaitanya was to refute the doctrine of Monism and preach devotion to Hari.

Another doctrine prevalent among some of the Bengali

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followers was represented by Sri Narahari Sarkar of Srikhanda and others. This doctrine known as '*Gauranagarabhava*' conceived Chaitanya as the beloved or '*nagara*' and his adorers as the women in love or '*nagaris*'. In an allegorical sense, Chaitanya's life at Navadvipa was conceived as a counterpart of Krishna's love-dalliances at Vrindavana. The religious attitude of the devotee according to this new conception became identical with that of Radha and the milkmaids who forsook society for the love of Krishna. Only on the pedestal of the adored now stood a new image,—the image of Chaitanya,—an ecstatic love for whom was prescribed as the high road to freedom from the petty bondages of the world.

At about the time when the *Chaitanya Bhagavata* was composed the Chaitanya movement apparently did not present a picture of unity. Differences of opinion and divergent loyalties to individuals created a number of sects. A large number of Bengal Vaishnavas were bound together by a common allegiance to Advaita. The followers of Advaita still constitute a considerable portion of the Vaishnava community in Bengal. Their present ways of life and thought as also the common traditions regarding their past agree in suggesting that they represented from the beginning a comparatively orthodox trend within the Vaishnava fold. Another similar sect developed round the personality of Gadadhara, '*Gauraparamyavada*', the basic doctrine of this sect,—supposing it was the same then as now,—consisted in an adoration of Chaitanya as the supreme object of worship. It is extremely doubtful, however, if all believers in '*Gauraparamyavada*' belonged to this sect. A faction fight far more important in character developed round the personality of the unorthodox Nityananda. His detractors were obviously many and the *Chaitanya Bhagavata* is full of tirades against such opponents. The conflict between the two rival groups, once so important in Bengal's religious history, has not entirely died out even to-day.

Besides the development of mutually exclusive sects within the body of the movement, signs of deviation are noticeable even in the early literature of the Vaishnavas. Jayananda's *Chaitanyamangala*, written some time after Vrindavanadasa's famous biography of Chaitanya, apparently indicates the growth of some new tendencies within Bengal Vaishnavism. In

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one place the work represents Chaitanya as expounding the principles of Yogic mysticism in a language alien to the Neo-Vaishnava tradition. More surprising still, Jayananda tells us of many high-caste women of Nadiya who followed the traditional path in their daily life, but were initiated through Chaitanya's touch into the spirit of the Vrindavana milkmaids and came to the Master by night for secret worship. This almost surpasses the worst vagaries of later Sahajiya thought. Here apparently is a new deviation from the main current of the movement. One however wonders whether Jayananda's version of Chaitanya's teachings is merely a casual statement for which the author alone is responsible, or whether it represents a genuinely new tendency reflecting the views and practices of a section. In support of the former supposition one may point out that Jayananda's views do not find any corroboration in any other known work of the period. Besides, the work in question also includes a large amount of matter extraneous to the faith and practices of the majority of Vaishnavas and as such do not enjoy any high reputation with the more orthodox. But a casual statement in *Srichaitanyachandramrita* of Prabodhananda written shortly after Chaitanya's death would suggest that the second supposition is more correct. In the said work the author lamented the sad degeneration among the followers of Chaitanya who had fallen far from the ideals of the Master Some shrank from activity, some were vain of their knowledge, some perverted the ways of worshipping Govinda, others still had recourse to meditations, austerities and Yoga. And when again we hear the echoes of Jayananda's words on Yoga and secret worship in the later works of the Sahajiyas, we seem to catch a glimpse of the missing links which connect the highly Tantricised Vaishnava Sahajiya cult of the later 17th and 18th centuries with the movement inspired by Chaitanya It seems that the Tantric-Yogic cults which deluged Bengal's socio-religious life ever since the days of decadent Buddhism and was still a power to reckon with in the lifetime of Chaitanya, early entered the fold of the Chaitanya cult along with the lower class converts and gathered momentum by the time of Jayananda. Discarded by the orthodox Vaishnava, they continued to flourish and reclaimed from among the lower orders of Vaishnava society perhaps the bulk of their flock which had

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strayed into the folds of the Chaitanya movement.

Such then were the conditions of Bengal Vaishnavism on the eve of our period. The '*Gauraparamyavada*' of the earliest epoch still flourished as the dominant faith of the Bengali Vaishnavas. Beside it, perhaps as a less powerful force, the '*Gauranagara-bhava*' continued to exist. The Yogic-Tantric deviation, early lamented by Prabodhananda and reflected in the *Chaitanya-mangala* of Jayananda, was perhaps consolidating itself in this period. The faction fights mentioned by Vrindavanadasa more than a quarter of a century ago still continued, to be sure. This was the state of Vaishnavism in Bengal when a new factor entered the stage and completely transformed its features.

(ii) The work of the Vrindavana gosvamins and their followers

While the Bengali followers at Navadvipa were pouring forth their devout sentiments in ecstatic lyrics, biographies and biographical dramas, another sort of work was going on in a different region. Ever since the Master's death, the *gosvamins* at Vrindavana were enunciating in scholarly seclusion the basic dogmas of the faith, chalking out the great outlines of their mystic philosophy, building the foundations of the new rhetoric of mysticism (*Bhakti-rasasastra*) and drawing up the code of daily conduct which the Vaishnava was henceforth to follow. Of the six *gosvamins* Raghunatha Bhatta alone wrote nothing, while the chief work of Raghunathadasa consisted of impassioned lyrics in adoration of the mystic-erotic love of Radha and Krishna. Works of far greater importance were produced by the four others. The theological and philosophical bases of the cult were first formulated by Sanatana. Rupa's *Samkshepa-Bhagavata-mrita* further developed and expounded the system of theology. The latter's genius was predominantly lyrical, and his *Bhaktirasamritasindhu* and *Ujjvalanilamani* laid the foundations of Vaishnava *Bhakti-rasasastra*, a new branch of mystical rhetoric so far as Bengal was concerned. Jiva, the gifted nephew of Rupa and Sanatana, carried these various develop-ments to their climax and completed the structure of Vaishnava philosophy. Another *gosvamin*, Gopala Bhatta, laid down the regulations for the guidance of the Vaishnava's daily life. Thus the entire structure of a regular and organised cult-system in all

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its varied details was hammered out in course of long strenuous years.

Rupa's writings belong mainly to the period between 1533 and 1550. Some at least of Sanatana's works were written as late as 1554. *Haribhaktivilasa* of Gopala Bhatta was composed before 1541. Thus by the middle of the 16th century the foundations of the system were deeply laid. It was at this point that Jiva took up the work. Beginning to write in about 1555, he continued till 1592 and perhaps till 1599.

The influx of the new system, which had nothing of the indefiniteness of the Navadvipa school, occurred in Bengal during the later part of Sri Jiva's lifetime. The genius of the six *gosvamins* had already secured for the Bengali school an ascendancy over the other rival Vaishnava systems at Vrindavana. But, surprising to say, the works of Vrindavanadasa, Jayananda and Lochanadasa of the Navadvipa school seem practically unaware of this rising eminence of the six *gosvamins*. The case seems to have been one of genuine ignorance rather than of sectarian jealousy. We are told that at the positive behest of Sri Jiva, the works of the *gosvamins* were carried to Bengal by three of his ardent followers—Srinivasa Acharya, Narottama Dasa and Syamananda,—in the last part of the 16th or the early days of the 17th century. The ceaseless activity of the Vaishnava missionaries soon secured an ascendancy for the Vrindavana school. But the older sects and ideas were not entirely submerged. The conflict between the adorers of the unorthodox Nityananda and his detractors still continue. The image of Chaitanya is still worshipped by some at Nadia and elsewhere as the highest religious act. With Srikhanda in the Burdwan district as its chief centre, '*Nagara-bhava*' still enjoys some popularity. Those who owe their spiritual allegiance to Advaita are also not few in number.

(iii) Growth of the post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya cult

That a force fundamentally alien to the Chaitanya cult had entered the fold of the movement is clearly proved by a work composed in 1598 A.D. This work, *Rasakadamba*, indicates that the development of Post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya thought and practice had made considerable progress by the

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end of the 16th century, though perhaps in a somewhat incoherent and nebulous form. Four works, more definitely known to be products of the Vaishnava Sahajiya cult,—*Agama*, *Anandabhairava*, *Amritarasavali* and *Amritaratnavali*,—are attributed to the latter part of the 16th or the early years of the 17th century, though on the basis of insufficient data. These together indicate considerable growth in Sahajiya thought and practice. Yogic-Tantric mystic culture tempered and permeated by the ideal of love, characteristic of the Sahajiya system in its final stage of development, first appears in a clearly discernible form in these works. This, apparently, was a consummation of a long process of growth. Stray verses in the writings of Jayananda and Prabodhananda, referred to above, obviously indicate the entry of extraneous elements within the fold of the movement. Nityananda and Virabhadra admitted into the Vaishnava ranks many who belonged to the lower orders of society. Many of these neophytes were perhaps followers of the Yogic-Tantric or the earlier Sahajiya system. This remark is surely true of the '*Neda-Nedis*' (men and women with shaven heads), converted by Virabhadra according to tradition. Their older beliefs and practices had died too hard to be eliminated all of a sudden. It may not even be too much to presume that they persisted at least partially in their traditional ways under the easy garb of conventional Vaishnavism. A reconciliation was evidently sought between the old and the new. The pliable ideals of '*parakiya*'* love and '*prakriti sadhana*' familiar to the Chaitanyaites supplied a convenient means for the same. The new Vaishnava Sahajiya developed on the basis of a successful combination of these ideals and a reverence for the Vaishnava saints on the one hand with Yogic-Tantric and older Sahajiya thought and practice on the other. All this is partly conjectural, but nevertheless probable in the extreme.

Clear indications of this fresh growth is however not noticeable before the last part of the 16th century. From then on we have

* The word '*Parakiya*' means "belonging to another", i.e., a married woman, in this context. "Love to a married woman . . . . forms the central theme of the later Parakiya doctrine of the school, in which the love of the mistress for her lover becomes the universally accepted symbol of the soul's passionate devotion to God." (De). The Sahajiyas preached the ideal of '*Parakiya*' love as the basis of their mystic culture.

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an ever-growing volume of Chaitanyaite Sahajiya literature indicating no doubt a proportionate growth in the strength of the movement. The old and abhorred features of the original Sahajiya cult now came clearly to the foreground. For all we know the division of Chaitanya's followers in Bengal into two mutually exclusive classes,—Vaishnavas who are respectable householders deviating little from the traditional path and the less conventional and less respectable Vairagis,—must have started at least as early as the latter part of the period under review.

II. The Vrindavana gosvamins and the Vaishnava pioneers: their life and outlook

During this period the most significant feature of the Vaishnava movement in Bengal was the growing hold of the orthodox school fashioned by the Vrindavana *gosvamins*. An analysis of the life-histories of its founders throws considerable light on the true nature of this school and its implications as a social force. For this purpose one may leave out two of the six *gosvamins*,—Raghunatha Bhatta and Raghunathadasa, whose influence on the growth of Bengal Vaishnavism was less significant. Of the remaining four, Rupa and Sanatana were Karnata Brahmins by birth. Their great-grandfather Padmanabha, who first settled in Naihati, is said to have been the dispossessed scion of a princely Brahmin family of Karnata. Sri Jiva, who individually exerted the greatest influence on the growth of the movement, was the son of Anupama, the youngest brother of Rupa and Sanatana. Little is known about the life-history of Gopala Bhatta. But all the conflicting traditions which later arose about the history of this eminent *gosvamin* had one thing in common, viz., that he was a South Indian Brahmin. So of the six *gosvamins*, the four who exerted the greatest influence on the growth of Bengal Vaishnavism, traced their descent from non-Bengali ancestors. Definitely in the case of three of them and probably also in the case of the fourth, these ancestors belonged to the South, the traditional home of Hindu orthodoxy, particularly during the period of Muslim rule.

As to their education, Sanatana is known to have studied Sanskrit at the orthodox school of Vidyavachaspati of Navadvipa and his works bear eloquent testimony to his thorough

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acquaintance with the traditional scriptures. Of Rupa's early education, we know little beyond such evidence of a profound knowledge of the Sanskrit language and literature as his writings afford. Sri Jiva studied at Benares under Madhusudana Vachaspati, an accomplished grammarian, deeply versed in Smriti and Vedanta as well. That Gopala Bhatta also had a similarly thorough grounding in the traditional scriptures, the Smriti works in particular, is amply proved by the copious references to them in his *Haribhaktivilasa*.

As to the social and religious outlook of these *gosvamins*, the few available facts are sufficiently illuminating. The *Bhaktiratnakara* tells us that Rupa and Sanatana invited a number of Karnata Brahmins to settle near Ramakeli. This fact apparently shows that they kept up their inherited social and religious practices. They were also "in touch with the Navadvipa Vaishnavas and had from the beginning an obviously Vaishnava disposition". Further, they considered themselves impure for their contact with the '*Mlechchhas*' (the impure followers of alien creeds) and abstained from visiting the temple of Jagannatha from such considerations. The social and religious outlook of Sri Jiva, whose training in orthodoxy was even more thorough than that of his uncles, was very probably similar. The views of Gopala Bhatta seems to have been slightly more liberal than those of the three others. For he permitted the worship of '*salagrama*' by non-Brahmins and women. Beyond this there was little to distinguish between him and his fellow *gosvamins*. He paid lip-service to '*raganuga bhakti*', but the entire system of a Vaishnava's life as conceived in the *Haribhaktivilasa* is regulated at every step by scriptural injunctions.

Lastly, in studying the life and outlook of the *gosvamins*, as an important factor in moulding the shape and character of the movement, one must not fail to take note of the circumstances of their later life and the environment in which their works were produced. Ever since they retired to Vrindavana to devote themselves to the service of the cause, their lives were those of scholarly recluses. Now their only interests consisted in devotional acts and the work they were immediately engaged in. Their only contact with the outer world was through discussions of a religious character with their disciples and

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perhaps with the people of rival sects. '*Vairagya*' or indifference to things of the world, was their common attitude to life. The exclusively personal, individualistic and asocial attitude which such a mode of living is likely to foster, was further intensified by the example and inspiration of Chaitanya. The entire latter half of the Master's life was a long chain of religious ecstasies with which the world or society at large had little chance of interference. The resultant outlook of the *gosvamins*, strongly individualistic in character, was however modified to some extent by the desire to establish their school of Vaishnavism in conflict with the other rival schools. This necessity no doubt had a considerable influence on the shape of the movement itself. For the atmosphere at Vrindavana, which had become a resort of pilgrims from all over India, was predominantly Upper Indian, and in trying to formulate a system that would win the support of the majority, the *gosvamins*, deliberately or otherwise, bowed before the deep-rooted traditions of their human environment.

The men who popularised the system propounded by the *gosvamins* naturally resembled their teachers in their attitude to society and religion. Krishnadasa Kaviraja, an erudite Bengali scholar of the Vaidya caste, was a disciple of Rupa and Sanatana and spent his later life in Vrindavana. A devout Vaishnava of the Chaitanya school, he exemplified to the highest extent the Vaishnava ideal of humility, but was surprisingly devoid of any correspondingly liberal tendency. His outlook was marked by a complete lack of the spirit of criticism and an unqualified faith in authority. His views on society were indifferent and traditional. His attitude to all but the professed followers of his sect was one of undisguised hostility. His acceptance of the system propounded by the six *gosvamins* was blind and unquestioning.

The lives and thoughts of Narottama and Srinivasa,– and to a lesser extent, also of Syamananda,—were in fact moulded after the same pattern, in so far as their education and environment were concerned. The first two were erudite scholars and they all took their lessons in *Bhakti-rasasastra* from Sri Jiva at Vrindavana. All these varied aspects of the lives of the pioneers,—their orthodox education, their traditional outlook, their training under the *gosvamins*,—could not but

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deeply influence the shape and course of neo-Vaishnavism in Bengal.

III. The system propounded by the gosvamins: an analysis

The system which was moulded at Vrindavana was surprisingly traditional in character. All its texts were written in Sanskrit, the traditional language of Indian scriptures. In formulating their systems of theology, philosophy, *Rasasastra* and Smriti, the *gosvamins* accepted testimony as the highest source of knowledge. The method followed was consequentiy deductive. Dogmatic statements supported by appropriate and convenient quotations from old texts, specially those of the Vaishnavas, constituted their main stock-in-trade.

The works of the *gosvamins* conformed to the old Indian tradition, not merely in form, but also in content. The new reform movement under their guidance, unlike many older ones, did not take shape as a revolt against the Vedas and Vedic regulations. The Srutis and Smritis, on the contrary, were respectfully treated. The Puranas, however, were more copiously drawn upon as they were considered to be more suitable for the men of the Kali age. This conformity to Indian tradition profoundly affected the ideas and ideals which had first emanated from Bengal in a shape very different from that which later emerged. The dogma that Chaitanya was an incarnation of Krishna was still explicitly declared. But in contrast with the Navadvipa school, the new system looked on Krishna himself as the highest object of devotion. '*Gauraparamyavada*' was thus discarded and '*Gauranagarabhava*' condemned in strong language. The object, conscious or otherwise, was perhaps to cater to the taste of the people of India at large, who had already accepted Krishna as the supreme deity in large numbers. Hence it would be easier to popularise the worship of Krishna who was born as Chaitanya than that of Chaitanya who was same as Krishna. To this fact perhaps was due the Vrindavana *gosvamins'* immense literary output on the life-story of Krishna and virtual indifference to the life-story of Chaitanya. Hence perhaps in the *Haribhaktivilasa* the worship of Vishnu,—venerated even by the most orthodox,—was exalted over that of Krishna, so dear to the

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heart of the Bengali Vaishnava.

The daily rules of life to be followed by the Vaishnava householder, as laid down by the *gosvamins*, were very similar to those sanctioned by orthodoxy. The practices prescribed in Gopala Bhatta's *Haribhaktivilasa* and the later work *Satkriya-saradipika* ascribed to the same author, are much more in conformity with the traditional features of the movement than with its distinctive ideas of '*raganuga bhakti*'. Devotion to Hari (*Hari-bhakti*), no doubt, was accepted as the highest ideal; but '*bhakti*' here implied devotion in accordance with scriptural injunctions. '*Vaidhi bhakti*', in fact, was the key-note of the entire system expounded by Gopala Bhatta, each statement in his work being supported by copious quotations from the Puranas, Samhitas, Tantras and other scriptures and sectarian religious treatises. Dealing largely with topics proper to Smriti works, it evolved a Smriti of its own based on sectarian scriptures. The *Satkriyasaradipika* dealt with domestic rites and ceremonies, the '*grihya*' ritual, on the avowed basis of the Smritis.

The Tantras, against which the Neo-Vaishnava movement was in many ways a conscious revoult, also exercised a deep influence on their practices and rituals. This was particularly true of the rites connected with initiation. The '*guru*' was to be a person deeply versed in Tantric lore. The '*mantras*' to be used were to be in part '*vija-mantras*', apparently unmeaning sounds symbolising hidden truths. The form of initiation was avowedly Tantric, even a '*yonikunda*'* being dug for the purpose. The general anathema against all acts concerning other deities significantly excluded the observance of *Siva-ratri*. And the few instances here noted surely do not exhaust the list of Sakta-Tantric practices adopted or condoned by the Vrindavana *gosvamins*.

But still the fact of a conscious revolt against the excesses of Tantricism was there. And with the proverbial zeal of pioneers, the *gosvamins* carried this reformist tendency often to an extreme. Some widespread Tantric practices were definitely forbidden. But the motive here might have been as much sectarian as reformist. Avoidance of unclean food like fish

* *Yonikunda*—Sacrificial pit shaped after the *Yoni*, an important item in Tantric worship.

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and flesh and of such Tantric occul practises as '*uchchatana*', '*vasikarana*' etc. was enjoined. The Vaishnava was asked not to use '*Padmaka*', '*Raktachandana*' and '*Usira*' varieties of sandal, associated with Sakta worship, and also to abstain from the use of all animal products except musk in morning worship. These obviously were attempts to underline the distinctive features of the new system as contrasted with the widely prevalent Tantric practices, the influence of which could not be entirely shaken off. That many of the ritualistic prohibitions were also due to mere taboos and fetishes is proved by the long list of forbidden food, apparently harmless to all uninitiated souls.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the new system was its basic mystic ideals. However orthodox in their daily observances and general outlook, the *gosvamins* refused to compromise with traditionalism in this particular sphere. Devotion following the path of emotion and, unbounded by scriptural laws, became the avowed object of ultimate attainment. The asocial and amoral mystic love-longing of the milkmaids for Krishna, their selfless participation in his eternal dalliance with Radha, became the ideal pattern of devotion which the Vaishnava sought to emulate. Devotion alone counted and, in the last analysis, everything else became superfluous. The trackless path of '*raganuga bhakti*' was open unto all and so might Divine Grace (*prasada*), descend on any one irrespective of caste and creed. Such beliefs, extremely emotional in character and not unattended by the dangers of anti-mundane reaction and moral perversion, drew their inspiration from older *Bhakti* cults centering round the Radha-Krishna legend and the *Bhagavata Purana* as also from the example of Chaitanya's religious experience. These, to some extent, helped the liberating forces first unleashed by the Master.

The cult was thus based on a number of different foundations. Pre-Chaitanya Vaishnavism, as expressed particularly in the *Bhagavata*, seems to have been the chief source of inspiration. According to Dr. De, the movement was also much indebted to the Ramanuja sect of the Vaishnavas. In the works of the *gosvamins* the life and teachings of *Chaitanya* remained mostly in the background. But the higher esoteric ideal of

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'*raganuga*' was no doubt deeply influenced by the ecstatic religious experiences and frantic love-longing for the deity which marked the Master's life. A third basis of the movement was the traditional faith and religious life of the majority of the Indian people as it was then expressed in the Smritis and the Puranas. A source of no lesser importance were the Tantras which had become a terrific force in society and religion through centuries of growth. The Bengal Vaishnava movement, even leaving aside the deviations from the main current, was thus no simple homogeneous faith founded by a Master and preached by his disciples. It was a complex conglomeration of many currents and cross-currents of India's social and religious life as it was in the 16th and 17th centuries.

It is necessary to discuss in this context the popular notion regarding the relations of Chaitanyaism with the mediaeval religious movements which owed their origin to the interaction of Hindu and Islamic influences. These religious movements which found such powerful exponents as Namadeva, Kabir, Nanak and Dadu, had certain features in common. Faith in the unity of the Deity, tolerance and respect for Islam and an open challenge to the caste system were the most important of such features. These, however, were in no way the strong points of Chaitanyaism, which is often supposed to be a cult closely allied to the above-mentioned ones. Unity of the godhead, – in the sense in which either the Upanishads or the Quran preached it, – was no part of Bengal Vaishnavism. The Chaitanyaites, on the contrary, were eager to prove the superiority of Krishna to other gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. As regards their attitude to Islam, it was one of contempt, if not of positive hostility. Their attitude to caste, though much more liberal than that of the orthodox both in theory and practice, never constituted a direct challenge to the age-old social organisation of Hindu India.

Chaitanyaism, however, did have much in common with certain mediaeval Indian religious movements. Ever since the days of Ramanuja (12th century) the Bhakti movement, centering particularly round the cults of Rama and Krishna, had been gaining in strength in various parts of India. The Vaishnava movement, with its emphasis on personal devotion to the deity of a highly emotional character, also had a long

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tradition in Bengal from Jayadeva to Chandidasa. Chaitanyaism had obvious affinities with these two trends though the fact of their direct influence on the growth of post-Chaitanya Bengal Vaishnavism is difficult to prove. Mystic religious aspirations were the common urge behind them all. They, again, were all marked by a comparative indifference to social problems and inequities which were among the chief concerns of the movements originating from the composite influences of Hinduism and Islam.

IV. The social origins of Neo-Vaishnavism : a hypothesis.

For a proper understanding of the character of Chaitanyaism even in its later phases, it is necessary to take note of the social factors which were probably responsible for its origin. Though the Vaishnava literature of the mediaeval Bengal throws occasional light on the question, in the present state of our knowledge any conclusion is bound to be speculative in character.

The various facets of Bengali life in the sixteenth century were dominated by a number of distinct forces. Politically, the region was subject to the followers of an alien creed who, despite their virtual adoption of Bengal as their motherland, indulged in occasional orgies of fanaticism at the cost of the Hindus. Then, as now, the Sakta-Tantric creed dominated the religious life of the Bengali Hindus. Only it was a much more living and powerful force in the 16th century. In the realm of intellect, Navyanyaya with its extreme tendency towards scholastic subtleties was the rage of the day. Neo-Vaishnavism appears to have rebelled with varying degrees of emphasis against these three forces dominating contemporary life.

Faith, not logic, was declared emphatically to be the way to communion with the Deity. The logician was described as an 'evil-minded one' *(Kuvuddhi)* and a noisy jackal, while dry logic was compared to the tasteless oil-cake. Liberation of the misguided logicians was mentioned among the objects of the Chaitanya incarnation. The *Chaitanya Bhagavata* refers to the state of sad decline in which the cult of *Bhakti* had fallen at a time when even the expounders of *Gita and Bhagavata* were indifferent to the need for devotion. The Bengal Vaishnavas accepted without question the dogma that Advaita, through the

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magnetism of his devotion, brought Krishna down on earth in order to restore the decadent cult of *Bhakti*. Chaitanyaism was thus a conscious reaction against the path of knowledge and the heartless scholasticism of the neo-logicians.

That it was an equally conscious reaction against the dominant cult of Sakta-Tantricism, particularly its perversions and excesses, is proved by various uncharitable references and the contemptuous mention of the sexual practices and drinking habits of the Saktas in the well-known Vaishnava works. Punishment of the '*pashandis*', an uncomplimentary epithet applied to non-Vaishnavas, particularly the Saktas, was also held to be one of the objects of the Chaitanya incarnation.

That there was an element of opposition to Muslim influence in Chaitanyaism seems almost certain. The *Premavilasa* referred to Muslim rule as the root of all evils. In the *Advaita-prakasa*, the spread of Muslim ways of life was deplored. Jayananda mentioned the adoption of Muslim habits by Brahmins as one of the aspects of the manifold degradation characteristic of the Kali age. Chaitanyaism has been mentioned in a recent work as an important element in the attempts made by mediaeval Bengali Hinduism to save itself from the rising tide of Islam. This is a point which cannot be definitely established and to trace the origin of the Chaitanya movement only to this factor is undoubtedly a mistake. Still the fact remains that in west Bengal the very classes whose counterparts in the east were converted to Islam in large numbers, remained within the Hindu fold due, no doubt, to a great extent to Vaishnava influence.

Chaitanyaism, thus viewed in its proper perspective, appears as a revolt of emotionalism and simple piety against a regime of barren intellectualism and the unsatisfying path of knowledge, as a revival of Vaishnavism long cornered in Bengal by the rival Sakta-Tantric creed, as a reformist movement protesting against the excesses of Tantricism and finally, as one of the many defences set up by Hindu society against the onrush of Islam. When in our period Chaitanyaism acted as one of the chief forces moulding Bengali society, the significance of such elements in the movement became patent.

V. Nature of the Vaishnava Sahajiya cult: an analysis.

For a proper understanding of Chaitanyaism as a social

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force, it is necessary to analyse the character of the Sahajiya cult which became virtually a part of the movement and, in one form or another, had a large body of followers. The Post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiyas had, in course of time, much in common with the main current of the movement. The ideal of '*raganuga bhakti*' going back to the days of pre-Chaitanya Vaishnavism permeated both. Approach to the Deity in the manner of a woman approaching her lover,—a characteristic of post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya in its earlier phases,—was another common feature, derived obviously from the same source. The later Sahajiyas were also devout worshippers of Chaitanya.

But the differences between the two were profound. While accepting the '*raganuga*' ideal in common with the orthodox, the Sahajiyas completely discarded the practice of '*vaidhi bhakti*' even for the meanest man. The only forms of ritualistic devotion countenanced by the movement was a sort of esoteric sexo-Yogic practice abhorred by the orthodox. In the second place, the practical culture of religion in the company of women was a feature derived from the pre-Chaitanya Sahajiya movement. Under the influence of Chaitanyaism, the true nature of the practice appears to have been toned down for a while. But in the next epoch this modification was discarded and practical culture in the company of women other than one's wife was openly preached. Works of an even later date, like the *Nayika-sadhana-paddhati*, spoke in clear language of adulterous sexual union as the path which led to the Sahajiya's supreme object of attainment. This apparently was the consummation towards which the movement had been leading. Thus the movement was but the continuation in a somewhat altered form of the older movement of which poets like Chandidasa were the exponents. The pre-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiyas, unlike their earlier progenitors, the Buddhist Tantric Sahajiyas, at least glorified in theory the ideal of '*nishkama parakiya*', i.e., '*parakiya*' unpolluted by lust. But in the later phases there was an upsurge of the unwholesome traits of the movement until in the decadent days of the 18th century, there was little to distinguish between the secret religious practices of the Sahajiyas and those of the Tantric '*kulacharis*'. The Sahajiyas, however, never entirely discarded the ideal of sexless love which

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now appeared under the name of '*marma-parakiya*'. Further, it has to be noted that the bulk of the followers of this cult did not, in all probability, adopt the asocial practices recommended by their creed. In the case of the Sahajiyas, such practices appear to have been confined only to a comparatively limited number of mystics.

VI. Influence of Neo-Vaishnavism on Bengali society.

In evaluating the influence of the Chaitanya movement on Bengali society, one has to remember that Vaishnavism never became the creed of the majority of the people. Even now, the Sakta-Tantric creed is more popular among the Hindus of Bengal. If at any period of Bengal's history, the majority were converted to Vaishnavism, the present ascendancy of Sakta-Tantricism could be explained only with reference to some Sakta reaction at a later date. No such reaction is known to history. More positive evidence is supplied by the sections on '*digvandana*' or invocation to the gods which appear in the Bengali '*panchalis*' of the 16th and 17th centuries. The majority of the shrines mentioned in these lists, written in the heyday of Vaishnavism, are non-Vaishnava, being mostly dedicated to Tantric or local deities. Evidently the new movement, though it had made considerable headway, failed to dislodge the older cults from their position of primacy. If this was true even of West Bengal (where most of the shrines mentioned in the '*mangala-kavyas*' were situated), it was more so of the east and the south-east. The men of the lower castes, who constitute the majority in Bengali Hindu society, accepted Vaishnavism in large numbers in West Bengal. But in the east, the majority of the lower as well as that of the higher caste Hindus stuck to the Sakta-Tantric creed. Thus Vaishnavism in Bengal never became anything more than the faith of a powerful minority.

In the life of this powerful minority, Vaishnavism introduced many far-reaching changes. The socio-religious atmosphere of Bengal in the 16th century, if we are to believe in the evidence of Vaishnava literature, stank with the bacchanalian orgies of Tantric ritual and the consequent spread of the drinking habit and also perhaps of sexual immorality. From such abuses of religion, the upper class converts to Vaishnavism were definitely freed. The drinking habit declined. Non-vegetarian food was

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largely discarded. A change in life-habits was supplemented by a corresponding change in the ideals of character. The often-ridiculed humility of the Vaishnavas no doubt offered a pleasing contrast to the vanity of the logicians.

The purifying influence of Vaishnavism on the morals and ideals of the converts was, however, considerably modified by the growth of the post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya cult. For sexual morality was never the strong point of the Sahajiya cult which now perhaps counts the majority of lower class Vaishnavas among its followers. Still, it is fairly certain, that Vaishnavism rescued from the squalor in which they were wallowing such sects as the '*Neda-Nedis*'. If their morals could not be perceptibly improved, their ideals surely were. The emotionalism of the Radha-Krishna cult and the esoteric ideal of '*marma-parakiya*' had no doubt a mellowing effect on people who, prior to their conversions, were perhaps the adherents of sexo-Yogic practices of a perverted type. The anti-caste tendencies inherent in the Chaitanya movement, but circumscribed in many ways, also seems to have borne fruit among these humbler neophytes. The society of the *Vairagis* or *Jat Bostoms* is a casteless one to-day and one may presume that this particular feature is fairly old in view of its established character. Caste prejudice is so very strong even in the lowest strata of Indian society that three centuries seem hardly too long a period for the complete acceptance of such a revolutionary change. So this levelling process might have started in our period, even if it did not reach its climax then. The looseness of the nuptial tie gives a particularly emancipated appearance to the society of the *Vairagis*. This surely was no effect of Vaishnavism, but probably a continuation of the older customs of the low-born neophytes. The '*parakiya*' ideal of the Sahajiya movement with its increasingly Tantric traits might have had something to do with it. On the whole, the conversion surely had beneficent effects on these people. Today, despite the looseness of the nuptial bond and the tendency on part of bad characters to flock within the Sahajiya folds, the *Vairagi* represents a finer spiritual and social outlook than the average member of the lower orders. The majority of them abstain from unclean food. Devotional songs and '*nama-samkirtana*' (chanting the name of the Deity) give a religious emotional

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touch to their daily life. Though a section of them has taken to Vaishnavism as a profession, many earn their living as honest householders and both the classes enjoy a certain status and prestige in many parts of Bengal. These purifying effects must have been first felt towards the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century when the zeal of the great pioneers from Vrindavana was extending the hold of Vaishnavism in Bengal and bringing in new converts from all classes of society.

It has been often supposed that Vaishnavism introduced a revolutionary change in the ideas and practices of caste in Bengal. So far as the majority of the Bengalis,—who were non-Vaishnavas,—are concerned, this theory may of course be summarily dismissed. Even among the Vaishnavas, the modification of caste-ideas and practices was much less revolutionary than is popularly supposed. The *Haribhakti-vilasa* throughout reveals a deep reverence for the system of caste. In the system expounded by Gopala Bhatta, the Brahmin continued to hold his place of honour. He alone could act as preceptor to all castes, '*gurus*' belonging to the other castes being allowed only to initiate men of their own or lower castes. Initiation of men belonging to a higher caste by a preceptor who was on a lower rung of the caste-ladder (*pratiloma-diksha*) was strictly forbidden. Women and noble-minded Sudras were given only limited rights of initiation into Tantric '*mantras*'. Such limited rights were no special feature of Vaishnavism, but granted by the Saktas as well, who even allowed women to act as preceptors within certain limits. Inter-caste marriage was not introduced. Even inter-dining, except on the occasions of the great festivals, did not come into vogue. On such occasions too the low-born converts apparently kept themselves aloof. For Krishnadasa Kaviraja mentioned with approval Haridasa's abstention from the communal feast.

But granting these limitations, it is impossible to gainsay the fact that within the Vaishnava society the rigours of the caste system were considerably relaxed. The fact that the Brahmin's monopoly of the right of preceptorship was encroached upon and even a Sudra could be a '*guru*' does in itself signify an almost revolutionary change. What is more, the prohibition of '*pratiloma-diksha*' was flouted in practice when low-born Syamananda and Kayastha Narottama assumed the leadership

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of the movement in the 17th century and counted among their disciples many belonging to higher castes. That even the ideas of untouchability were modified is proved by the story of Kalidasa, uncle of Raghunathadasa, who partook of the remnants of food eaten by a Sudra Vaishnava. And though the modification of caste-practices was less striking, the change in the realm of ideas, was truly revolutionary.

But some of the unwholesome features of the caste-ridden society gradually became prominent within the body of the movement. Jayananda's *Chaitanyamangala* first noticed the growth of a class of people who were turning their Vaishnavism into a profession. Brahmananda Giri, the famous Tantric ascetic, referred with contempt to Vaishnavas who lived by begging. The express provisions for the payment of '*dakshina*' (gifts) to the '*guru*' mentioned in *Haribhaktivilasa* indicate the growth of a class of professional '*gurus*' among the Vaishnavas. The reform movement was thus swamped by the old parasitical class, whose numbers were now definitely increased by the addition of non-Brahmins to their ranks.

The absence of any wider social outlook alone circumscribed the progressive character of the movement. As Dr. De points out, the intensely personal nature of the higher ideals of the movement, which consisted only in an emotional religious ecstasy of the mystic-erotic type and an exaltation of the sex impulse, denuded it of all intellectual virility. The emotional strain involved in the effort to participate imaginatively in the love-play of Radha and Krishna might easily have an enervating effect. That the social effects of such a devotional ideal were in fact enervating, does not necessarily follow. But still the fact remains that the ideal of virile manhood and any portrayal of the sterner virtues are conspicuous by their absence from the literature of the Vaishnavas. The traditional belief of the people that the Vaishnava does not represent the type of a very masculine male is also not entirely without significance. If one is allowed to speak in such vaguely general terms for a while, one may say that the Vaishnava movement, with its emphasis on devotion and softer sentiments, accentuated the emotional temper of the Bengali character. Tender emotionalism is at least the dominant note of the entire volume of Vaishnava literature.

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The Chaitanya movement was not without its influence on the non-Vaishnava society of contemporary Bengal. The ideal of *Bhakti* assailed the thought and practice of Sakta-Tantrics as well and the awe and reverence which characterised the attitude of the Sakta devotee to his object of worship, gave place to love and devotion. A tender emotionalism permeates the '*mangala-kavyas*' of the post-Chaitanya era, and Chandi, the fierce female deity, appears as a loving mother goddess in the masterpiece of Mukundarama. More direct evidence of Vaishnava influence is afforded by the same work, written in honour of a semi-popular semi-Sakta deity. For it openly preaches the ideal of Chaitanya worship and refers to the chanting of Krishna's name as a meritorious act. In non-Vaishnava works, the veneration of Chaitanya was soon supplemented by a veneration of Vaishnavas themselves in a language which vied with that of Krishnadasa or Vrindavana-dasa.

A legacy of Chaitanyaism, which may to-day be looked upon as the common heritage of all Bengalis, is the vast literature it produced. Even leaving aside the immense volume of '*padas*' inspired by the movement,—and these include some of the best lyrics in the Bengali language,—there were the numerous '*nibandhas*' or religious tracts, the works on *Rasasastra*, a practically new branch of mystic rhetoric, and what was more, the biographical works, a completely new literary experiment so far as Bengal was concerned. For the first time in the literary history of Bengal, here was an attempt to glorify man instead of gods, to deal with facts in place of fancy. But an unwholesome communalism and an infantile credulity marred this noble effort.

In fine, Vaishnavism in Bengal was much less a revolutionary force than is generally supposed. It failed to convert the majority of the people. Even on those whom it did convert, it failed to work a revolutionary change. Starting out from Bengal as an emotional upsurge, it returned in a subdued form,—Indianised, codified and cast in conformity with orthodox traditions. Its slightly liberalising and purifying effects and its immense literary products definitely cannot be ignored. But its direct effects on the upper classes were subject to numerous limitations. Its indirect effects were wider, but less

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significant. Of the lower orders, those who were converted were largely reformed and liberalised. But considerable sections went back to older Yogic-Tantric practices through the back-door of the Sahajiya cult. The revolutionary potentialities of the Chaitanya movement thus floundered on the bed-rock of traditionalism and older Yogic-Tantric practices.

APPENDIX B

Rasakadamba—a Sahajaya text?

Rasakadamba is considered by some to be the first Sahajiya work of the post-Chaitanya period, while others have contradicted this view. True, '*prakritibhajana*' (worship wherein the devotee assumes the psychological attitude of a woman and as such enjoys in contemplation the love-dalliance of Krishna directly or vicariously) which is the central theme of the work, was no idea peculiar to the Sahajiyas only. It was repeatedly mentioned in the Vaishnava works of our period and the highest form of mystic culture as described in the *Premavilasa* is practically identical with '*prakritibhajana*'. Still, many of the characteristic features of the later Vaishnava Sahajiya are unmistakably traceable in *Rasakadamba*. The conception of '*sahaja*' or natural love which is the basis of the Sahajiya system is mentioned twice in the work with reference to Krishna's relation with the milkmaids. *Nityavrindavana*, the eternal land where Krishna dallies with Radha,—a predominantly Sahajiya conception,—is described in detail. Yogic physiology, another characteristic feature, is discussed at nearly as great a length. Purely Sakta-tantric ideas which loomed large in later Sahajiya doctrine, such as the identification of Siva and Sakti with the primordial male (*purusha*) and female (*prakriti*) principles respectively, are also mentioned. An extreme form of adoration for the preceptor, who for all practical purposes was put on a pedestal even higher than that of the great Master, is another link which connects *Rasakadamba* with later Sahajiya thought and practice. A specific account of five types of relations with women in which abstinence is compared to the ways of the much-maligned followers of the path of knowledge, a contemptuous reference to the vulgar rabble who ridiculed the ideas of '*prakriti-bhajana*' and love-culture and to the secrecy which

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usually enshrouded the latter are further evidence of the Sahajiya character of *Rasakadamba*. Also in a typically Sahajiya fashion, the author bowed respectfully to the Vaishnava saints and sought to trace back his ideas to that lofy origin. Such evidence surely indicates that *Rasakadamba* was at least strongly influenced by the Vaishnava Sahajiya cult, even if it was not a product of that system.

NOTES ON AUTHORITIES

Many of the conclusions stated and ideas discussed in this chapter have been treated in greater detail in chapter IV (the sections dealing with Vaishnava and Sahajiya thought). For detailed references, the notes on that chapter should be consulted.

I. For an analysis of '*Gauraparamyavada*', see *Chaitanya chariter upadana*, 100-101. For '*Gauranagarabhava*', see *Srikhander prachin Vaishnava*, 34 and chapter IV of the present work. For the followers of Advaita, see *Kennedy*, 62-3. For the followers of Gadadhara, see *Chaitanya chariter upadana*, 187-88. For the people hostile to Nityananda, see *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, 57, 198, 201, 202 etc. For exposition of Yogic mysticism by Chaitanya, see *Jayananda*, 74. For an account of secret worship of Chaitanya by Navadvipa women, *ibid.*, 84-5. For Prabodhananda's lament regarding the degeneration among Chaitanyaites, see *Srichaitanyachandramrita*, *sloka* 38 (quoted in *Chaitanya chariter upadana*, 171).

For detailed account of the works written by the Vrindavana *gosvamins*, see *De*. For the traditional account regarding the manner in which these works were brought to Bengal, see *Premavilasa*, chapters XVI and XVII.

For the dates of the early Sahajiya works, see *Post-Chaitanya Sahajiya cult*, 202. For a discussion of the ideas expounded in these works, see Chapter IV of the present work. For conversion of the '*Neda-Nedis*', *Kennedy*, 70-71.

II. For the life-stories of the Vrindavana *gosvamins*, see *De*, 93-6, 109-12. For Sanatana's description of himself as a fallen creature, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 349. For an account of Gopala Bhatta's social and religious outlook, see *De*, 340-41, 355. For the illiberal and uncritical attitude revealed in *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, see discussions in chapter IV. The life-stories of the Vaishnava pioneers are told in *Premavilasa*, *Karnananda* of Yadunandana Dasa and *Bhaktiratnakara*, an 18th century work; also see the *Vaishnava Literature of Mediaeval Bengal*.

III. For the didactic and dogmatic method followed in the works of the *gosvamins*, see *De*, 171-172, 341; for their attitude to '*Gauraparamyavada*' and '*Gauranagarabhava*', see *Chaitanya chariter upadana*, 42-3, 104 etc. For exaltation of Vishnu, see *Haribhaktivilasa*, I, 21-6; Dr. De traces this tendency to S. Indian influence (343). For an account of *Satkriyasaradipika*, see *De*, 341, 403. For Tantric elements in Vaishnava rituals and practices

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see *Haribhaktivilasa*, I, 34; VIII, 42; II, 19-28; XIV, 63-86; III, 145; V, 48-54, 75-89, 147-151 etc. For the prohibition of certain Tantric practices and tabooed foods, *ibid.*, II, 113; VI, 135-36; VIII, 5-6; XV, 61-63 etc. For the ideal of '*raganuga bhakti*', see *De*, 171-76, 412-22. For Vaishnava attitude to Islam, see Chapter IV of this work. For relation between Chaitanyaism and earlier Vaishnava movements, see K. M. Sen, *Vanglar sadhana*, 54-57.

IV. For Vaishnava attitude to logicians, followers of the path of knowledge and Saktas and their belief regarding the object of Chaitanya incarnation, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita, Adilila*, chapters III, XVII; also 72, 257, 273; *Chaitanya Bhagavata, Adi Khanda*, chapter II, *Madhya Khanda*, chapter XIX; also 119. For attitude to Muslims, see *Premavilasa*, I; *Jayananda*, 139; *Purva Pakistane Islam*, chapter V, also 102 (extract from *Advaita Prakasa*).

V. The analysis of the principles and outlook of the Sahajiya cult is based on the fuller discussion of Sahajiya thought and practice in chapter IV. For the sexual element in Sahajiya practice, see *Post-Chaitanya Sahajiya cult*, 67-72, 73-80 ('*marma parakiya*').

VI. An analysis of the '*digvandana*' sections in some of the more important Bengali poetical works of the 16th and 17th centuries discloses the following facts: of the 28 shrines mentioned in the *Chandimangala*, 2 are definitely Vaishnava, 22 Sakta-Tantric, 4 of local godlings; *Manasamangala* of Kshemananda mentions 5 Sakta-Tantric shrines, 4 dedicated to local deities and 3 sacred to Muslim *pirs*, but no Vaishnava shrines; Ruparama's *Dharmamangala* mentions 9 Vaishnava shrines, 26 Sakta-Tantric shrines, 25 dedicated to local deities and 5 to Muslim *pirs*. For Vaishnava caste practices see *Haribhaktivilasa*, 1, 36-38, 91; *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 257, 560-61. For permission granted by Saktas to women to act as preceptors, see *Saktanandatarangini*, 36-40. For reference to professional Vaishnavas, *ibid.*, 286. For payment of '*dakshina*' to '*gurus*', see *Haribhaktivilasa*, II, 74. For the effects of Vaishnava mystic ideals, see *De*, 412-23. For Vaishnava influence on the attitude of non-Vaishnavas see *Chandimangala*, 5, 132: *Mansamangala*, 7; *Dharmamangala*, I, 13; *Madhyayuge Vangla O Vangali*, 38.

Appendix. For the view that *Rasakadamba* is a Sahajiya work, see *Post-Chaitanya Sahajiya cult*, 203-06; for the opposile view, see *Rasakadamba*, introduction, 37. For ideal of '*prakritibhajana*', see chapter IV. See *Rasakadamba*, 30, 45 (sahaja) X (*Nityavrindavana*), 32, 33 (Yogic mysticism), 27 (identification of Siva with '*Purusha*' and of Sakti with '*Prakriti*'), 47, 61 ('*guru*' worship), 54, 66, (love-culture), 3, 82-83 (reference to Vaishnava saints) for the different aspects of the work and its connections with the Sahajiya cult.

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PART II

THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

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CHAPTER IV

TRENDS IN RELIGION AND CULTURE

I. Inter-relation of religion and culture in mediaeval Bengal.

Throughout the mediaeval period, culture in Bengal was closely interlinked with the religious life of the people. In fact these were so inextricably dovetailed with each other that one must view the two as integral parts of one organic whole. This is particularly true of the period under review.

That religion was the chief source of inspiration of mediaeval Bengali culture is most clearly indicated by the literature of the period. Nearly the whole of it is devotional in character. In the Mughal period, as much as in the days of the Sultans, the poets and litterateurs expressed themselves either in ecstatic lyrics of a mystic-symbolic type or sought to immortalise the popular legends associated with the worship of particular deities, Aryan or local, or sang of the miraculous powers and activities of saints like Gorakshanatha or Gopichand. A large number of works sought to explain the philosophy and rituals of particular cults. And even when Bengali poets, under Muslim or Hindu patronage, undertook translations of the epics, their works were permeated with deep religious feeling. When, again, the influence of the Chaitanya movement opened new fields for literary activity, the immense output in Bengali and Sanskrit,—often experimenting with such entirely new themes as biography,—proved to be not merely religious, but positively sectarian in outlook.

What was true of literature was nearly as true of other forms of cultural activity. Of the architecture of the period, the only notable survivals are mosques and temples. Forts and other secular buildings that have survived the ravages of time are not merely much fewer in number, but perhaps also architecturally less significant. Of the paintings, only a few can definitely be

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ascribed to the centuries preceding the eighteenth. Of these few, the themes are almost exclusively religious.

If religion was the dominant note of mediaeval Bengali culture, it was particularly so during the period under review. The first half-century of Mughal rule in Bengal saw the high tide of the Bhakti movement which had received its most powerful impetus from the life and work of Sri Chaitanya. The deep impression of Vaishnava faith and dogmas on the thought-habits of the people was perhaps the most significant feature of the culture of this epoch. Even if we leave aside the overt acceptance of Vaishnava ideas in non-Vaishnava works, we seem to detect a more elusive element in the culture-pattern of the period, almost certainly related to the new doctrine of faith and cult of emotional love for the Supreme Being. We seem to catch glimpses of the cult of the child Krishna in the tender delineation of childhood in non-Vaishnava works. Legends which in a previous epoch sang of man's revolt rather than his surrender to the will of the gods (e.g. the legends of Chand Sadagar and Maynamati), now emphasized above all, as told by the new poets, the element of divine grace. Powerful tales of defiance, when told by the poets of this period, betray obvious evidence of weak handling. They excelled more easily in the portrayal of all that is soft and mellow,—the tender '*rasas*' triumphed over their more virile counterparts. True, no definite theory can be built up on the basis of such elusive data. Still, the significant hints strewn through the literature of the period are too numerous to be ignored.

But all that was produced during the period was not predominantly religious in character. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Bengal attained a position of pre-eminence in India's cultural life chiefly due to her achievements in the field of Navyanyaya. Religion had no direct bearing on the development of this highly abstract subject. Metaphysical discussions on the nature or existence of God might come within the purview of Navyanyaya, but method rather than matter was the chief preoccupation of the neo-logicians and their extreme emphasis on '*pramana*' or 'inference' naturally excluded all tendency towards emotional religiosity. In Vaishnava circles, in particular, they seem to have become objects of pointed attack and the

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epithet '*Kutarkika*' or 'evil dialecticians' frequently occurring in Vaishnava literature, almost surely referred to the Naiyayikas and their godless spirit of criticism.

God or His men had also less obvious connections with another branch of culture, viz., the secular romantic literature which began to develop in this period under the patronage of the courtiers of Arakan. But even in these primarily secular works, the deeply religious temper of the age is often clearly reflected.

II. Religious life in Mughal Bengal : constituent elements.

The religious life of Bengal in this period was a complex conglomeration of several distinct elements. The lines of demarcation which marked out these several elements one from the other had, however, been blurred to a great extent and it was difficult to distinguish clearly the various constituents.

Hinduism and Islam were obviously the two most clearly distinguishable elements in the religious life of the people. But even there, if one takes full cognisance of the beliefs of the masses, one hesitates to emphasize the points of distinction. Within Hinduism, the most active and vital force perhaps was the Neo-Vaishnava movement which was now functioning as a militant proselytising creed. Within it, the Vaishnava Sahajiya movement with its strong Yogic-Tantric bias was being reborn in a fresh and somewhat unsavoury form. The Sakta-Tantric cult also was anything but moribund. Then, as now, it surely claimed the bulk of Bengal's population among its followers. It was also producing men of some eminence as well as religious compendiums which still enjoy great prestige in Bengal. And lastly, there was the religion of the masses who, in their deep devotion, bowed to all and sundry. In their eclectic and extremely heterogeneous pantheon, deities of orthodox Hinduism stood side by side with the saints and the local godlings whose aspects were often altered in order to be invested with a certain amount of respectability. Even evil spirits were mentioned with reverence in the list of the objects of worship.

III. The Neo-Vaishnava thought system.

Of these numerous forces in the religious life of the epoch, Neo-Vaishnavism alone had genuinely creative potentialities,

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though in a somewhat limited sense. The basic idea on which the entire structure of its thought system was built consisted in an inexorable faith in the superiority of devotion (*bhakti*) to knowledge (*jnana*) as the *summum bonum* of the life religious. In fact, the devout Vaishnava went even further and believed that '*bhakti*' was the only acceptable creed. The author of *Chaitanya-charitamrita* described the founder of the faith as rejecting even devotion tempered with knowledge (*jnana-misra bhakti*) as an admissible ideal ; devotion unmixed with knowledge (*jnana-sunya bhakti*) had his partial approbation ; but the only ideal dear to the Master's heart was that of devotion to the Deity as a friend (*sakhya-prema*), as parents (*vatsalya-prema*), and as a lover (*kanta-prema*). The follower of the path of knowledge was compared to a crow sucking the bitter fruit of the *nimba* tree, while the adherent of the way of love was described as the cuckoo feasting on mango blossoms. Faith, not reason, was declared to be the way to salvation in emphatic language. "He who discards reasoning and listens with faith", said the author of *Premavilasa*, "receives the grace of Radha and Krishna at the end of his life". A lyrical passage in the *Chaitanyacharitamrita* beautifully illustrates the Vaishnava ideal of '*bhakti*'. It tells the story of an illiterate Brahmin who daily recited the Gita with ecstatic tears. To him the flowing verses conveyed no sense. But the unmeaning words called up before his mind the dark beautiful image of Krishna, as he sat whip in hand on Arjuna's chariot. To this ignorant man, said Chaitanya, was the meaning of the Gita truly revealed.

The '*bhakti*' which was the ideal of the Vaishnava was very specific in form. It was to be devotion to Krishna and Krishna alone. All actions, good and bad alike, which stood in the way of this devotion, were but the darkness enshrouding the souls of men. To Krishna's servant was opened an ocean of bliss; the knowledge of *Brahman*, attained a million times, was not comparable to a drop thereof.

The way to salvation was simple enough. It consisted merely in the recitation of Krishna's name (*nama samkirtana*). '*Samkirtana*' was declared to be superior to all sacrifices ; million horse-sacrifices were but equivalent to a single recitation of Krishna's name, which was likened to the wish-fulfilling tree. In *Kali*, the age of sin, such recitation was but the only

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religion for man. The Vaishnava's faith in the efficacy of this formula was carried to a ludicrous extreme. To him it appeared that the Muslim's only hope of salvation lay in the fact that he frequently uttered the word '*haram*' (unholy), which sounded like the faithful's invocation of Rama's name (*ha Ram*=Oh Rama !).

Faith in the divinity of Chaitanya and his chief followers was nearly as important an element of the Vaishnava credo as devotion to Krishna and his name. The devout Vaishnava accepted without question the theory that Krishna and all his associates of Vrindavana were born as the Lord of Navadvipa and his followers respectively. To know the taste of Radha's love and preach the glory of Krishna's name were the twin objects of the incarnation at Nadiya. The chief followers and preachers were each believed to be the incarnation of some particular deity or companion of Krishna. Thus Advaita was Mahavishnu himself, Nityananda was an incarnation of Balarama, Mukunda in his previous existence was Vrinda, while Srinivasa, Syamananda and others were in reality the milkmaids engaged in eternal dalliances with Krishna in the ageless land of Vrindavana.

The idea of Chaitanya's Godhood was carried very far by certain sections of the Bengal Vaishnavas. The followers of '*Gauraparamyavada*' looked on Chaitanya as the ultimate object of worship. The believers in '*Nagarabhava*' portrayed him as a replica of the youthful lover of Vrindavana and preached the ideal of a devotion to the Master similar in spirit to the milkmaid's love for Krishna. The latter had early received a powerful impetus from the leadership of Narahari Sarkar of Srikhanda, a direct disciple of Chaitanya. Narahari wrote only stray lyrics embodying the thoughts and feelings of '*Nagarabhava*'. Lochana, his disciple, composed a full biography based on this conception of Chaitanya in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. It is, however, a significant fact that passages clearly expressing the typical ideas of '*Nagarabhava*' occur but infrequently in Lochana's *Chaitanya-mangala*, though the author composed many '*padas*' similar in sentiment to those of Narahari. What is more, neither Lochana nor Narahari did ever picture their Master as indulging in youthful dalliances similar to those of Krishna.

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They merely stated that his 'lotus-eyes' and 'moon-like face' roused a holy passion in the hearts of the men and women of Nadiya. Chaitanya, no doubt, was the eternal lover ; but he was so only in a figurative sense. Unlike the later Sahajiyas who attributed to Chaitanya a female companion for mystic culture, the followers of '*Gauranagarabhava*' in portraying the life of Chaitanya, painted a clean and spotless picture which faithfully represented the Master's personality.

The Vaishnava cult of absolute devotion and anti-rationalism necessitated a willing suspension of disbelief in all matters connected with the articles of faith. An unquestioning faith in miracles, often carried to a ludicrous extreme, was among the logical consequences of such an attitude. As Krishnadasa Kaviraja put it without mincing matters, "He who does not believe in the miracles of the Master, is doomed in this world as well as the next". The earlier writings, like the work of Vrindavanadasa for example, are in no way deficient in miraculous anecdotes. But with the passage of time, the old habit seems to have died very hard indeed, so that authors like Krishnadasa Kaviraja pictured the life of the Master as one unending series of miraculous events. They began with accounts of the signs of divinity on the hands and feet of the infant Chaitanya, went on to describe the revelations of God-hood in his childish pranks, wrote enraptured passages on his acts as *Nrisimha* or *Varaha* incarnation and recorded with naive credulity the story of the wild animals singing the name of Krishna or the one about the leper being cured by the mere touch of Chaitanya's hands. For the later authors, the scope of miracles was not even confined to the life of Chaitanya and one described without hesitation the appearance of the lord with his followers at the great festival at Kheturi, more than half a century after his death, through the power of Narottama's devotion. The same Narottama, we are told, tore open his chest and showed the resplendent sacred thread within, in order to prove his Brahminhood. Strangely enough, Nityanandadasa, the narrator of such tales, was a contemporary of Narottama. His statements, we are told, were meant to be taken in a figurative sense. But in his work itself there is little to indicate such an attitude.

If unquestioning faith led the devout Vaishnava into the

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blind alley of infantile credulity, it inculcated at the same time an ennobling belief in the universal right to salvation. To secure salvation for the fallen and the lowly, was declared emphatically to be the prime object of the Chaitanya incarnation. The flood-gates of devotion, as Krishnadasa Kaviraja put it, were opened by Chaitanya and his associates ; all men and women, both good and evil, were drowned in the waters of that flood. All created beings were to attain salvation without even tasting of the fruits of sin. Later preachers freely 'saved' Muslims and Chandalas and the later authors asserted openly that a devotee of Krishna automatically ceased to be a Sudra.

Modification of caste-ideas was a logical corollary of the doctrine of universal salvation. The grace of God, according to one of the fundamental beliefs of Chaitanya's followers, is not subject to Vedic institutions ; nor does it respect the differences of caste and rank. This idea was carried to its logical limits by the later authors in particular. When Narottama was born, says the *Premavilasa*, caste was at an end and the Brahmin played freely with the Sudra through the intoxication of divine love. Elsewhere the same work, while extolling the spirit of '*raganuga*', denounced the follower of caste and other scriptural injunctions as one whom the Lord would never accept as His own. The later Vaishnava preachers were repeatedly mentioned as being indifferent to caste and often even to barriers of religion. And through the example of the numerous saints from Haridasa to Syamananda, born outside the pale of the upper castes, the idea definitely gained ground that one could transcend the caste barriers through the purity of one's devotion.

But this ennobling view of devotion failed to act as a socially liberating ideal. For '*bhakti*', as the followers of Chaitanya conceived and practised it, was no militant devotion like that which inspired the early Muslims, but an ecstatic religious emotionalism with a strong tendency towards effeminacy. In the post-Chaitanya Vaishnavism of Bengal, "the dogma is implicitly accepted that Krishna is the only male in the universe, and the highest ideal of the devotee, like that of Radha, is the desire of a woman eternally seeking to satisfy her lover. The dogma is carried further when

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the devout attitude becomes identical with that of Radha's companions, the highest mystic experience being in this case the detailed imaginative participation, in a vicarious mood, in the erotic sports of the deity. The identification of Chaitanya's devotional attitude with Radha's '*viraha*' (separation from the lover) in the thought and literature of the sect contributed much to this particular development. In later works like *Premavilasa*, the highest spiritual experience is described as an imaginative participation in Krishna's love-sports at Vrindavana. The leaders and saints of the movement were venerated as incarnations of Radha's female companions. No amount of gloss is sufficient to cover up the obvious tendency towards effeminate emotionalism inherent in such conceptions. The world of Neo-Vaishnavism, as revealed in its literature, appears to the uninitiated layman as a 'dim vast vale of tears'. Tears flow in an unending stream on a wide variety of pretexts, both possible and impossible. Devotees clasp each other in tear-strained embraces nearly as often as they happen to meet. Fainting fits occur but all too frequently and '*stambha*' '*sveda*', '*vepathu*',—fine nuances of physical emotion originating from religious ecstasy which can hardly be described in any foreign tongue,—loom large in that fantastic universe.

Apotheosis of tender virtues, however, brought in its train an ideal of character which was undoubtedly noble, though not particularly masculine. In the long lists of Vaishnava qualities occurring in the literature of the sect, quiet humility, purity, beneficence and exclusive devotion to Krishna featured most prominently. The Vaishnava was to suffer cruelty with the patience of a tree; like a tree, again, he was to give quietly unto others all that was his own. Goodness without vanity was one of his highest objects of attainment. The ideal of humility was stressed with particular emphasis. "Deep is his devotion to whom calumny be praise",—sums up the Vaishnava ideal of life and conduct.

The militant sectarianism and bitter intolerance of the Vaishnavas offered a strange contrast to this ideal of humility and non-resistance. The Vaishnava authors pronounced a universal anathema against all who did not belong to their sect. '*Pashandi*',—a term which literally means 'evil ones'—

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was the epithet applied to all such, including everyone who looked on Brahma, Siva and other deities as equals of Narayana or refused to honour Chaitanya. And, in the opinion of the devotees, such faithless ones,—little better than demons,—were sure to end in hell, even though they were punctilious in the observances of their own creed. Mercy, the much-vaunted ideal of Bengal Vaishnavas, was evidently not meant for those who persisted in their disbelief. Infliction of dire punishments such as leprosy on the bitterest opponents of Chaitanya and his followers is mentioned in Vaishnava literature, apparently as a warning to erring men. The Vaishnava sought to prove in detail the superiority of his creed. Pursuit of other creeds was like sucking at the milkless teat of a she-goat or, even worse, like the taking of poison. Those guilty of such folly were likened to dogs and swine. The '*tarkikas*' or dialecticians and Samkarites (*mayavadins*) were the Vaishnava's pet aversion. Even listening to an illusionist discourse was taboo to the devout, for they believed that the felicity of uttering Krishna's name was for ever denied to those who indulged in such illusionist jargon as '*brahman*', '*atma*' and '*chaitanya*'. The dialecticians were likened to clamorous jackals. To prove the superiority of the Krishna cult to Saivism and Saktism, Siva and Durga were described as slaves of Krishna. Even such Vaishnava sects as did not believe in the efficacy of worshipping Krishna alone were considered to be deluded. Of all the manifestations of the Lord, that as Krishna only was declared to be worthy of adoration and subtle theological arguments were adduced to prove the inferiority of Rama and Narayana. All relations with non-Vaishnavas were strictly forbidden, and acceptance of the '*mantra*' from a non-Vaishnava preceptor was described as being one of the shortest routes to hell. The attitude to non-Hindus was of course illiberal. The Muslim scriptures were declared to be false and insupportable. Rupa and Sanatana considered themselves 'fallen' because of their contact with Muslims. Syamananda, who converted a number of Muslims, most surprisingly asked the Raja of Narayanagad not to employ Muslim porters as was the usual custom there.

But this uncompromising fanaticism need not blind one to the fact that in actual practice toleration was not unknown

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to the Vaishnavas. The community had thrown open its gates to neophytes of all ways of thinking. Like the Jesuit missionaries, they earnestly considered the 'unbelievers' to be poor deluded creatures and were eager for the salvation of even the '*yavanas*' and '*pashandis*'. Their condemnation of other creeds was but a denouncement of what they honestly believed to be evil. Even in theory, a certain amount of toleration was often prescribed. Krishnadasa Kaviraja mentioned abstention from speaking ill of 'other gods' and 'other scriptures' as an obligatory duty of all Vaishnavas. But this surely was a duty in the observance of which the famous biographer was not very punctilious himself. Even he, however, was ready to make concessions where the signs of true devotion,—whichever deity might be its object,—were too patent to be despised; and he mentioned with respect Anupama's devotion to Rama which he declined to give up even at the instance of his celebrated elder brothers, Rupa and Sanatana.

Vaishnava thought, even in its social aspects, was interlinked with the abstract philosophy of the movement. This philosophy, so far as the common run of the Bengali Vaishnavas were concerned, is perhaps better represented by the expositions of higher mysticism in the popular biographical works of the period than by the scholarly volumes of the Vrindavana *gosvamins*. The writings of the *gosvamins* had attained by now the status of religious scriptures, only next in importance to the *Bhagavata*. But one may assume without any risk of grave error that a knowledge of their ideas was transmitted to the humbler followers of the faith mainly through the medium of the more popular Bengali works.

The basic conception on which Neo-Vaishnava philosophy was built consisted in a differentiation of the two types of qualities of Krishna as the supreme Lord, viz., '*aisvarya*' and '*madhurya*'. '*Aisvarya*' connoted the manifestations of divine power in the ordinary sense of the term; Krishna's love for his lawful consorts is its typical example. '*Madhurya*' implied all the tender qualities in Krishna and included, when concretely conceived, much that was risqué from the purely social point of view; Krishna's love for Radha and the milkmaids was believed to be its supreme manifestation. The superiority of '*madhurya*' to '*aisvarya*' was the first postulate of Bengali

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Vaishnava philosophy. Hence '*parakiya*', as manifested in Krishna's extra-marital amours, was apotheosized in preference to his love for his legitimate consorts (*svakiya*). Hence, too, the exaltation of ecstatic emotions in religion and the lower status of devotion which followed the dictates of scriptures. From such mystic ideals was derived a religious outlook which, however circumscribed by orthodoxy, rejected at least in theory the scriptural laws of caste, '*asrama*' and the like. Some authors like Krishnadasa, sought to modify the conception of '*parakiya*' by referring to the conventional explanation that Radha and the milkmaids were really the lawful consorts of Krishna who merely sought to taste of their lord's love in a more delectable form. In the later works, however, such modifications were considered unnecessary. But the purity of the ideal was throughout emphasized. In a verse familiar to all students of Bengali literature, Krishnadasa clearly distinguished between 'love-devotion' (*prema*) and 'love-desire' (*kama*). The latter was described as a desire to please one's own senses; the former, as a longing to satisfy Krishna. Echoing these sentiments, later authors decried '*samanya rati*' (desire in its vulgar form) and upheld the ideal of '*Krishna-rati*', i.e., selfless devotion to Krishna.

IV. Vaishnava Sahajiya thought.

Closely related to, but in no way a mere part or product of the Chaitanya movement, was the post-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiya cult.

The followers of this cult accepted early without question the Godhood of Chaitanya. *Rasakadamba*, the work which is supposed to have first embodied the new Sahajiya ideas, referred with deep respect not to Chaitanya alone, but to all his great followers as well. *Anandabhairava* and *Amritarasavali* also did the same, while *Agama* explained in detail the theory of Chaitanya's incarnation. *Anandabhairava* traced back the origin of Sahajiya practices to Virabhadra, Nityananda and ultimately to Chaitanya, while *Amritarasavali* traced it back to the same ultimate source through Krishnadasa Kaviraja, the Vrindavana *gosvamins* and Nityananda.

The ideal of '*prakritibhajana*', the starting point of the post-Chaitanya Sahajiya development, loomed large in the standard

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Vaishnava works of the period. Spiritual participation in the love-dalliance of Radha and Krishna as a female companion of Radha witnessing the sport divine was the essence of this particular form of mystic culture. Krishnadasa Kaviraja, in narrating the discussion of Ray Ramananda with Chaitanya regarding the supreme objects of attainment, referred to this form of worship as the path leading to Krishna in Vrindavana. *Premavilasa* spoke of Narottama's initiation into this particular form of mystic culture by Srijiva. This was the attitude which the pre-Chaitanya Vaishnava Sahajiyas from Jayadeva to Chandidasa (we may include the former in the list by a somewhat liberal interpretation of the term, 'Sahajiya') had cultivated in the main. The *Rasakadamba* was devoted chiefly to the exposition of '*prakritibhajana*' and mentioned its three forms,—worship as Krishna's consort, as Radha's female companion sporting with Krishna and as a '*sakhi*' witnessing the sport divine. The last-mentioned variety was extolled as the highest state of spiritual perfection.

In its final form, the Sahajiya cult was in many ways different from the simpler ideal of '*prakritibhajana*', which became merely a submerged element in a complex pattern. Men and women were there conceived as temporal manifestations of Krishna and Radha, the eternal male and the female, the perennial enjoyer and the enjoyed. '*Sahaja*' was the emotion of the purest love flowing between Radha and Krishna, or '*Rasa*' and *Rati*', as the Vaishnava authors often called them. "For the realisation of this Sahaja nature, therefore, a particular pair of man and woman should first of all realise their true self as *Rasa* and *Rati* or Krishna and Radha,—and it is only when such a realisation is perfect that they become entitled to realise the *Sahaja* through their intense mutual love". This attribution of divinity to man or '*aropa*' and mystic sexo-Yogic culture in company of a woman other than one's wife, inspired by the emotion of love without lust, became the characteristic features of the later Sahajiya cult.

We do not, however, come across this completed form in the works attributed to the period under review, though even these indicate a considerable progress in this direction. Many of the basic conceptions on which the final structure was built were already clearly formulated and Radha and Krishna were already

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identified with the two basic principles underlying the universe,—'*Purusha*' and '*Prakriti*',—according to the Samkhya and the Tantras. Radha and Krishna were but one self divided into two. In other words, Krishna was the Ultimate Being and Radha was his original '*Sakti*'. The eternal land where the primordial male and female sported with each other was known as '*Nitya Vrindavana*' or '*Gupta Chandrapura*'. Another basic belief, which probably contributed to the theory of '*aropa*', was the need for self-realisation. 'To understand one's self is to understand the universe', the Sahajiya authors emphatically declared. The conception of '*sahaja*', the basis as well as the ultimate object of attainment of the cult, was also clearly formulated. In spite of the veiled and mystic-symbolic language of the texts, it is not difficult to discern its nature. *Sahaja*, as described in *Amritarasavali*, was a supramental state, existing within the mind like a shadow ; but through an incredible paradox, this state of bliss which the mind sought in vain was in an illusory way known to the body. The human body was the basis for the attainment of '*sahaja*' and thus in '*sahaja*' were united the elements of poison and nectar. That this physical element,—the element of poison,—consisted in psycho-sexual culture was made clear by statements to the effect that Krishna and Siva tasted of '*sahaja*' in the company of the milkmaids and the Koch women respectively. So the ideal of '*sahaja*' consisted in the attainment of a transcendental state of bliss through the culture of human love even in all its sexual implications.

But in describing the process which led to this supreme attainment, the texts clearly distinguished between pure love and vulgar desire and pointed out in unmistakable language the dangers which attended the latter. Two types of '*kama*' (desire) were distinguished: '*prakrita*' and '*aprakrita*', the vulgar and the transcendental. '*Prakrita kama*' or physical desire led only to hell, while '*aprakrita kama*' was equivalent to worship. This transcendental state could be attained only by the elect. It was reached when a perfectly purified being (*Visuddha-sattva*) was united with one who had achieved unsullied spirituality (*suddha-sattva*) in an extra-marital (*parakiya*) asocial union. Physical union (*sangama*) in this supreme stage of '*sadhana*' was surely not precluded. But, as the *Amritarasavali* pointed out, lust remained as hidden from the true lover as love from

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the lustful ones. Only a perfectly non-attached being (*nirvikara*) could reach this stage, while one who started on the journey with evil passions (*vikara*) was damned. The man worthy of the highest achievement was like one dead in life and having attained '*sahaja*' he could take the poison of bodily love without danger to himself. Of the two types of mystic culture, psychological (*maner karana*) and physical (*vahyer karana*), the former was declared to be superior.

Certain differences between the earlier and later forms of the system are noticeable. The theory of '*aropa*' or attribution of divinity to man, which later became the corner-stone of Sahajiya belief and practice, is hardly discernible in the earlier texts, though perhaps the assertion that the knowledge of the universe was attainable through a knowledge of the self marked its first beginning. Secondly,—the most surprising fact of all,—though the ideal of '*parakiya*' in mystic culture was definitely upheld, Radha was declared to be really a '*svakiya*' companion of Krishna. Radha and Viraja, the wives of Krishna in Nityadhama were, according to the *Agama*, punished for their suspicions and querulousness and condemned to be born in Vrindavana as wives of others. But so that their chastity might not be affected in the least, Krishna himself was born as 'part incarnations' (*amsa*) in the form of cowherds who married Krishna's legal consorts, now born as milkmaids.

Still, there were obvious similarities between the earlier and later forms of the system, the basic elements being more or less identical. Two such noticeable traits were the extreme secrecy which enshrouded the cult and its close affiliations with the Yogic-Tantric systems. The *Amritarasavali* related in detail the miracles which had earlier prevented any publication of the secrets lest the vulgar should misunderstand and abuse it, and ended with a word of caution about its future secrecy. The authors spoke of the secrets of their faith in an extremely mysterious and veiled language. Symbolism and long allegories occurred frequently in their writings and even the strenuous efforts of experts have hardly succeeded in completely unfolding the mysteries contained in these.

Traces of Yogic-Tantric influence are writ large on these early texts. In *Agama* and *Anandabhairava* the high mysteries of the faith were revealed in the form of dialogues between Siva and

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Sakti. In the latter, a detailed account was given of '*deha-tattva*', i.e., the inner psychic basis of human physiology as described in the Yogic writings, with some modifications (e.g., the three basic nerves, '*Ida*', '*Pingala*' and '*Sushumna*' are not mentioned). The preceptor or '*guru*' featured prominently in these writings, being mentioned first and thus preceding even Chaitanya in the list of adorable ones. Tantric-Yogic influence is perhaps discernible in this trait, but the psycho-sexual practices which characterised the Sahajiya movement ever since its inception are a more definite evidence of such influence.

It is interesting to note the attitude of the Sahajiya texts to the orthodox Vaishnavas. Like all deviationists, the Sahajiyas held themselves to be the true adherents of the unsullied Vaishnava faith, while their orthodox co-religionists were declared to be the deluded ones. For an understanding of the high mysteries of this faith, they declared, love was an essential requisite. Hence was the true realisation denied to the deluded Vaishnavas (*mayamohita Vaishnava*) who stuck to orthodox ways and falsely considered themselves followers of the *gosvamins*.

V. Ideas and practices of the Sakta-Tantric cults.

As already noted, the Chaitanya movement and its Sahajiya appendage, despite their revolutionary potentials, failed to dislodge the Sakta-Tantric cults and the worship of local godlings from their position of primacy. In our period, no fresh or significant development took place in the history of Sakta-Tantricism. But the cult still counted among its followers, eminent scholars and ascetics who produced a number of important compilations. These compilations and similar works written in the preceding epoch clearly indicate the trends in Sakta-Tantric thought and practice in Bengal in the early days of Mughal rule.

Among the Tantric scholars and ascetics, definitely known to have lived in this period, was Purnananda Paramahamsa Parivrajaka. His *Saktakrama*, dealing in seven chapters with Sakta rites, was completed in 1572 and *Sritattvachintamani*, dealing with Tantric rites in general and with those concerning the worship of Srividya in particular, in 1577. Besides these, his works include *Tattvanandatarangini* and *Shatkarmollasa*, dealing with black rites in the main, and the famous *Syamarahasya*, a treatise on the worship of goddess Syama according to *Kulachara*.

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Chandrasekhara, another Tantric author, wrote his *Puraschara-nadipika* on the ways and merits of repetition of '*mantras*' attended with other rites probably in 1590 A.D. A work on *Kulachara*, known as *Kulapujanachandrika* is also ascribed to him. There are also several manuscripts of Tantric commentaries going back to our period,—e.g., one on *Anandalahari* by Mahadeva Vidyavagisa (Ms. No. 6694), dated 1605 A.D. and another on *Saradatilaka*, dated 1618 A.D.,—in the possession of the Asiatic Society. Mahadeva Vidyavagisa is also known to have written a number of works on Sakti, Siva and Vishnu, apparently in the same period.

Though some of these works are still considered highly authoritative, they reveal a surprising lack of variety and are devoid of any originality or profundity. They endlessly discuss with negligible variations the same rites and practices only with regard to different deities and, in so doing, base their statements on earlier standard works whose authority they accept without the slightest hint of a question. They are almost exclusively concerned with Tantra ritual and the laying down of processes and rules and, with few exceptions, are remarkably indifferent to the philosophy of the Tantras.

Such philosophy as is there in some of these works contain nothing new, but merely repeat some age-old concepts. The *Saktanandatarangini*, written in the previous epoch, briefly described the nature of the soul and the Supreme Soul, the Great Illusion, attachment and the ultimate way to salvation. Using the conventional imagery, the author analysed the fundamental oneness of the soul manifesting itself in many forms and of the Supreme Soul assuming the forms of various deities. The soul and the Supreme Soul were also described as being identical and thus the principle of Non-Duality underlying the Tantric system was clearly stated. The second basic postulate stated in this work was another commonplace of Indian philosophy, viz., the doctrine of '*karman*'. Action, good and bad, led to the accretion of results and thus caused an endless chain of rebirths. Action was caused by attachment (*moha*) and Mahamaya, or the great illusion, who enchanted even the gods was the cause of '*moha*'. But the same Mahamaya also opened the path to salvation (*moksha*). For she was of two types : '*vidya*' (knowledge) and '*avidya*' (not-knowledge). While '*avidya*' caused attachment, '*vidya*' led to non-attachment and hence to

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salvation. Then came the question of worship. The *Brahman* being without qualities *(nirguna)*, his worship was declared to be an absurdity. But for the convenience of worshippers, shapes and forms were conceived. When worship was offered with a consciousness of the separate existence of the worshipper, there was an accretion of good results. When such consciousness of duality gave place to a feeling of oneness between the devotee and the Absolute, a liberation from the chain of existence and merger with the Universal Soul followed. A statement in *Tararahasya* of Brahmananda Giri, also written in the previous epoch, supplements these basic postulates. There all men and women are declared to be identical with Siva and Sakti respectively. Purnananda in his *Sritattvachintamani* declared emphatically his faith in the path of knowledge as the only one leading to salvation. He, however, pointed out a somewhat new line of thought by seeking to reconcile Vedanta with Tantra in a direct way, through the identification of '*Sabda-brahma*' (*Brahman* manifesting himself as eternal sound) with the '*Kundalini Sakti*" (the form in which the female principle underlying the universe resides in the body of created beings). He emphasised another point in Tantric philosophy, viz., the belief in '*prakriti*' as the highest means for the attainment of supreme knowledge.

These dogmas do not mark any progress beyond the stereotyped theories of the Vedanta and the ancient Tantras. These, however, indicate that the followers of Sakta-Tantricism, in their preoccupation with rituals and mystic practices had not entirely lost sight of the basic philosophy underlying their cult. For some at least, the elaborate and often bizarre rites had not yet degenerated into mere lifeless form enlivened by no higher ideal.

"The age-old controversy about the admissibility of wine in worship against clear Vedic prohibition created in Bengal as elsewhere a sharp division of the Tantric worshippers into two rival schools popularly known as *Pasvachara* and *Kulachara*". Besides eschewing wine in worship, the *Pasvacharins* generally adhered to the Vedic rites and rules of life modified through centuries of change and the influence of the Tantra. The *Kulacharins*, on the other hand, developed a form of mystic culture in which the notorious five 'm's.*—wine, women, meat, fish and

* The names of the five objects essential for these practices begin with the letter 'ma'. Hence the name, '*pancha ma-kara*', i.e. five '*ma*'*s*.

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fried cereals,—featured most prominently. The latter was regarded as the highest form of Tantric practice and, according to the earlier texts, only those who had already attained the knowledge of the Absolute (*Brahmajnana*) were entitled to practise it. *Pasvachara*, or the practice of animals, was meant for the common run of men who, in terms of spiritual growth, belonged to the animal level. Though *Kulachara* spread on an unusually large scale in Bengal, the majority of the works of our period is concerned with *Pasvachara*. And it may also be assumed that the majority of the householders who followed the Tantric ways, confined themselves to this less dangerous path.

The practices of *Pasvacharins* represent rather a particular approach to the question of religion and worship than a set of fixed and rigid formulas to be followed by the members of a sect. The works dealing with *Pasvachara* show an extreme eclecticism with regard to the choice of deities and, unlike the Vaishnavas, never insist that salvation is attainable only through the adoration of some particular god or goddess. The numberless gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are declared to be merely the various forms, male or female, assumed by the *Brahman* for the benefit of the devotee. The *Sritattvachintamani* prescribed the worship of Ganesa, the Sun, Siva, Parvati and Vishnu, while the *Tantrasara* laid down the detailed regulations regarding the worship of a far larger number of deities including even such purely Vaishnava gods as Krishna, Valagopala, Vasudeva and Lakshminarayana. Only the form of worship followed a somewhat fixed pattern based on beliefs peculiar to Tantricism.

The first three essentials of Tantrik worship were the '*guru*', the initiation (*diksha*) and the '*mantra*'. The '*guru*' who initiated the devotee into the secrets of worship was declared to be identical with Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara, nay, even with *Brahman*. Specific qualifications for preceptorship were described and supreme honour to the '*guru*' and his family was enjoined. Initiation, which was the chief function of the '*guru*', was attended with endless beneficial consequences. It led to salvation, according to some ; to various heavens, according to others, while others still believed in its ability to destroy the results of sins accumulated through a billion previous existences. The '*mantra*' was a cryptic symbol consisting of some apparen-

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tly unmeaning sounds known as '*vijamantras*' and was imparted at the initiation by the '*guru*' to his disciple. From the initiation onwards this '*mantra*' became the most important element in the disciple's formula of daily worship. The '*vijamantra*', when deciphered, implied an adoration of some particular deity or other into whose worship the disciple had been initiated. The worship prescribed for *Pasvacharins* consisted largely in '*purascharana*' or repetition of the ''*mantra*' attended with appropriate meditation (*dhyana*) and rites. An important element in the daily worship was the various mystic symbols and diagrams known as '*yantras*', '*chakras*' and '*mandalas*', one or several of which were associated with the worship of each particular deity.

But all these external rituals and formulas constituted only the lower form of Tantric worship. Even for the *Pasvacharin* a higher culture was prescribed which alone could lead to the ultimate object, viz., consciousness of oneness with the *Brahman* and the consequent merger with the Supreme Being after death. This higher culture in its practical form was identical with the Yogic practice of '*shatchakrabheda*'. Yoga conceived of a higher physiology according to which the human body was said to be in more or less concrete sense the seat of the eternal male and feminine principles underlying the universe. Inside the body six '*chakras*' or lotuses were imagined, the uppermost of which (*sahasrara*) was supposed to be the seat of Siva and the lowermost *(muladhara*) that of *Kundalini Sakti.* Besides there were the thirty-five million nerves (*nadi*) of which the chief one, '*sushumna*' passed along the spine through the six '*chakras*' connecting '*muladhara*' with '*sahasrara*'. To rouse the sleeping *Kundalini Sakti* with appropriate meditation (*dhyana*) and mystic breathing exercises (*nyasa*) and to lead her through the six '*chakras*' to a union with Siva in '*sahasrara*' was the highest object of the Yogic-Tantric practices. When this union was achieved, there followed a secretion of nectar (*amrita*) which the devotee tasted with his tongue turned back. Daily practice of this mystic exercise led to freedom from the bondages of this world.

Here, again, we come across nothing that is new. The works of our period only repeat without variation the commonplaces of Indian mysticism formulated centuries ago. That instead of

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using the older texts on the topic, the Tantric scholars and '*sadhakas*' described afresh the age-old belief and practices of Yogic '*sadhana*' and did so with accuracy, perhaps proves a demand for such fresh exposition. These Yogic-Tantric practices, still far from being obsolete, appear to have been more in vogue at a time when standard compilations and treatises found it necessary to discuss them in detail and in a practical understandable form.

This continuation of older tradition in a practically unaltered form is also the characteristic feature of *Kulachara* during our period. Here, again, the best-known works expressly stated to be compilations based on earlier writings confined themselves almost exclusively to the practical aspect of mystic culture and referred but incidentally to the underlying philosophy.

The philosophy as expounded in a somewhat earlier work, *Sarvollasatantra* of Sarvananda, described *Kulachara* as the highest means for the attainment of a knowledge of '*prakriti*' through which alone could union with *Brahman* be achieved. The culmination of Tantric mystic culture was a harmonious experience of the three forms of Sakti or '*prakriti*'—the 'subtle' one within the body, the 'luminous' one in various colours and the 'gross' form manifested as women. This experience was sought through a synthesis of the inner (i.e., mental) worship based on Yogic physiology and an outer worship with which the '*panchatattva*' or the *five m's* were associated. In *Kulachara* any goddess, i.e., any divine manifestation of the eternal Sakti, could be taken as the object of worship. The well-known treatises each dealt with the worship of some particular goddess or other though the worship of Tara and Kali was considered specially meritorious. But the rituals and practices as also the ultimate object were everywhere the same.

In practice, *Kulachara* combined an inner worship of the '*guru*' and Sakti, with an external ritual in which coition and the associated acts featured prominently. The inner worship of the *Kulacharin* was practically the same as the *shatchakrabheda* which the *Pasvacharin* also practised. Meditations on the '*guru*', who was identified with the Sivas seated in the six lotuses, and on the form of the particular Sakti whom the devotee worshipped were about the only distinguishing features.

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These works also describe a wide variety of gestures (*mudra*), breathing exercises (*nyasa*), incantations, diagrams (*yantras*) and the like, accessories to inner and outer worships more or less similar to those prescribed in the works on *Pasvachara.*

The rites associated with *five m's* and the mystic culture which had for its chief implement a human corpse (*savasadhana*) were, however, the most distinctive features of the system. The texts of our period nowhere discussed the why's and the wherefore's of such bizarre practices. These were just taken for granted on the basis of the testimony of standard authorities, and described in detail. The *Tararahasya* summed up the most important practice of *Kulachara* with the statement that it was the duty of the '*sadhaka*' to give his own wife to the '*guru*' and fellow devotees and to be united with the wives of others in the mystic circle (*sadhana-chakra*). Those incapable of such supreme detachment were advised to take prostitutes as partners in mystic culture. To be thus united with all women excepting the 'seven mothers' in a spirit of absolute detachment constituted the highway to success in mystic culture and to various miraculous powers. Thus in *Kulachara* ritual, as also in the images on which the *Kulacharin* meditated during his inner worship, sex and sexual symbols reigned supreme. In its extremest form, *Kulachara* identified the various sex-acts with the acts of worship and prescribed the sexual excreta as objects to be offered to the deity. In all these, there is nothing to suggest the use of symbolic language referring to mysteries other than those actually described. These practices, no doubt, were not meant for common men and that alone, if anything, can at all justify them.

But it seems hardly likely that *Kulachara* was confined in practice only to the elect few. In the 18th century, *Kulachara* held extensive sway not only in East Bengal, but also in Gauda, South Radha and other parts. As the *Dikshanachandrika*, an 18th century work, explained, not only those who had attained the supreme knowledge, but also their disciples as well as the descendants of those who had succeeded in their spiritual quest through *Kulachara* practices, followed this 'left hand path'. It seems very likely that the tendency towards such a development became noticeable as early as our period. From the 15th century onwards we hear of a large number of

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Kulacharins in Bengal who were said to have reached the desired goal through their esoteric practices. It would be surprising if the less saintly disciples of such successful (*siddha*) mystics did not seek to emulate their masters. The Vaishnava literature of the 16th century refers to the associations of wine and women with Sakta worship in a way which does not suggest mere falsehood prompted by sectarian hatred. What is more, the influence of *Kulachara* on the *Pasvachara* texts of this period clearly indicates its growing ascendancy.

In fact the works dealing with *Pasvachara*, unable to wriggle out of the influence of *Kulachara*, seems to have made a deliberate effort to modify and restrict the latter's baneful effect. The author of *Tantrasara* and following him, Brahmananda Giri quoted the authority of *Srikrama* to prove that the offer of wine and meat in worship was forbidden for all but the Sudras and, in the opinion of some, even for the latter. Various substitutes to be offered by the different castes were suggested. But, paradoxically, the very passage which the *Saktanandatarangini* quoted in support of this contention contains a line directing the offer of wine beside the '*chakra*' to the west of the goddess. Even the images to be contemplated by the *Pasvacharins* were influenced by *Kulachara* ideas. The '*guru*' was to be worshipped as '*kamakelikalatma*', i.e. the Sakti underlying the act of coition, as the preacher of '*Kulapuja*' and even as *Kulachara* incarnate. In the meditation on the union of *Kundalini Sakti* with Siva seated in '*sahasrara*', sexual imagery once more crept in. In '*antaryaga*' (inner sacrifice) the devotee was to offer spiritually to the goddess within him 'an ocean of nectar, a mountain of meat and a heap of fish'. The *Sritattvachintamani* even prescribed the offering, in a spiritual sense, of an object very typical of *Kulachara* practices, viz., '*svayambhukusuma*' (the first menstrual mucus). What is more, even a work as ostensibly devoted to *Pasvachara* as the *Tantrasara* included sections on *Kulachara* which, besides describing '*savasadhana*', also recommended mystic culture in the company of a female partner.

Ultimate merger into *Brahman* through esoteric practices was, however, not the only object of Tantricism in mediaeval Bengal. Things far more earthy, which now go by the general but misleading name of 'occultism', had become inextricably

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interwoven with Tantric thought and rituals. Pursuit of worldly and often base objects through the attainment of miraculous powers, the invocation of the aid of supernatural agencies or mere magic rites was the key-note of such occultism. In its simplest and most harmless form, Tantric occultism prescribed the use of various amulets which still enjoy a surprising popularity among the high and low in this country. Harmless too were the '*mantras*' or verbal spells prescribed as remedies for the various ills of man's daily life, some of these even guaranteeing success in all undertakings. Then there was the dangerous path of '*Yogini-sadhana*', by treading which the successful devotee secured the favour of some particular *Yogini* or other, a supernatural being, who became his mother, sister, wife or daughter,—whichever he might desire,—with varying results. Services of other supernatural beings such as *Vetalas* could also be secured, and recipes were prescribed for the same. The really evil element in Tantric occultism consisted in the '*abhicharas*', the six notorious black rites, significantly described in *Tantrasara* itself as '*krurakarmani*' or evil works. To pacify a person's wrath, charm a recalcitrant heart, stop the course of nature, provoke hostilities and to cause death,—such were the objects of Tantric '*abhicharas*'. These rites appear to have been widely practised in one form or another.

Here we may note in passing the attitude of the Tantric texts towards caste. There was a marked difference in this respect between *Kulachara* and *Pasvachara*. Even a Sudra became a Brahmin through the practice of *Kulachara*, the *Tararahasya* emphatically declared, and Godhood itself was not beyond the reach of the low-born who followed this path. The *Pasvachara* texts, on the contrary, mentioned the different heavens to which the different castes were destined to go as a result of initiation. In *Kulachara*, caste-ideas were inevitably modified due to the association of lower caste women with the highest stage of '*sadhana*'. Besides, the condition precedent to a votary's admission into the '*chakra*' (secret circle) was 'an exalted state of mind where all caste-bondage really disappears'. It is, however, extremely doubtful whether such exalted notions affected the daily social intercourse in any appreciable way. For the secret and higher '*sadhana*' of *Kulachara* was in the nature of a mystic-esoteric cult with little reference to social

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life and relationships as such. That *Kulachara* was not entirely indifferent to caste barriers is proved by statements in *Tararahasya* which referred to the different paths prescribed for different castes and allowed women and Sudras to use the '*Pranava mantra*' only in a modified form. The Sudra's right to utter the '*Pranava*' was admitted by *Pasvachara* also, as is proved by the testimony of *Saktanandatarangini*. But the same work prescribed the initiation of Sudras only into a limited number of '*mantras*' and eternal damnation was mentioned as the consequence of any transgression on this point. What is more, preceptorship was openly declared to be the exclusive prerogative of Brahmins. That Bengal Vaishnavism was a progressive force in comparison is clearly proved by the encroachment on this exclusive privilege of Brahmins, which it sanctioned in practice.

Tantric texts throw an interesting sidelight on Sakta-Vaishnava relations in the 16th century. We have noted already the hostile and uncharitable attitude of the Vaishnavas towards all rival cults, the Sakta-Tantrics in particular. The Vaishnava literature of our period also contains numerous anecdotes regarding the persecution of Chaitanyaites by the majority community among the Hindus. The orthodox opposition to Chaitanya at Navadvipa mentioned in all his biographies is a story too familiar to require repetition. The *Premavilasa* tells us of an attempt made by a Brahmin of Sakta persuasion to persecute Chaitanyadasa, father of Srinivasa, for his Vaishnava leanings. The *Rasikamangala* described Orissa (which then included Midnapore) as an anti-Vaishnava country where '*samkirtana*' was forcibly stopped and whence Vaishnavas were expelled. That such stories contained an element of truth is proved at least partly by a long passage in *Saktanandatarangini* strongly condemning the Neo-Vaishnavas of Bengal. Significantly enough, Vaishnavas of the conventional type who stuck to practices sanctioned by orthodoxy were approved of. But for those who had left the ancient track, abandoned '*sandhya*' and '*gayatri*', and having put on '*tilaka*' marks and '*tulasi*' wreaths, sweetly chanted the name of Hari to the accompaniment of dances and instrumental music, no question of toleration did arise. Eternal perdition was declared to be the fate of such '*sankara* Vaishnavas' and all their ancestors and

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descendants. The land where they lived was damned for ever. Even the very sight of their faces necessitated expiatory rites. Thus, at least in theory, toleration was not the strong point of Bengali religious life in our period, so far as the two major Hindu sects were concerned.

VI. Folk religion of the Hindus.

But in sharp contrast to the proselytizing Vaishnava and the fanatical Tantrika, the common man of Bengal was undoubtedly tolerant. The poets of the mediaeval Bengali '*panchalis*' bowed before shrines of every cult,—including even those dedicated to Muslim saints,—in a spirit of almost universal eclecticism, evidently reflecting the general religious temper of the people. Though under Vaishnava influence some of them reviled the opponents of Vaishnavas, their invectives appear to be a harmless convention, rather than the expression of genuine rancour.

In the long lists of the adorable ones which constitute the prologues to the Bengali '*Kavyas*', a very large number of gods and goddesses are invariably mentioned. Reverence for these numerous deities was the chief feature of Hindu religious belief so far as the masses were concerned. The deities of the Puranic pantheon of course continued to be venerated as of old. Ganesa, Siva, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Vishnu and his ten incarnations, the Sun, Brahma, Yama, Pavana, Indra, Ganga as also Rama with his brothers and Sita were all mentioned with profound respect. But the worship of the Puranic deities, with few exceptions, had ceased to be a living reality. '*Pujas*' in honour of deities like Ganesa, Lakshmi and Saraswati were apparently confined to annual festivals. Then, as now, Durga *puja* in autumn was widely prevalent. Siva and Vishnu were still regularly worshipped in one form or other. At least in one shrine the Sun god continued to be worshipped as Chakraditya. But the majority of the shrines were dedicated to female deities of Tantric origin,—some being the various forms of Siva's consort,—and a large number of local godlings, some of whom had secured recognition even in the orthodox Smritis.

Of the deities of purely Sakta origin who had shrines dedicated to them, mention may be made of Bhavani, Bhagavati, Mahamaya, Kali, Nilamata or Tara, Varahi and Sarada. But more numerous were the goddesses of Tantric origin who had

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assumed special forms in the various localities or were perhaps the joint products of Tantric and local religious beliefs. Apparently the most popular among these goddesses was Chandi, the forest deity mounted on lizard, who became identified with the great consort of Siva. Sarvamangala, Jayachandi, Rankini, Yogadya, Vargabhima, Visalakshi, Uttaravahini, Vansuli, Chandramukhi and the like also belonged to this category. What specific features distinguished the conception or worship of these deities, one from the other, is for the most part a mystery today. Our sources throw only an occasional and inadequate light on the problem. Thus Sarvamangala was described as a goddess who wore a wreath of heads of demons *(asuras)* slain by her. Rankini was a deity whose face was besmeared with the blood she had sucked. Chandramukhi of Kamalpur manifested herself in the form of a slow-burning fire amidst a pool. Many of these numerous deities have fallen out of popular favour. Those who are still worshipped,—Yogadya of Kshiragrama for instance,—have in many cases assumed a vague and non-descript form. The Vaishnava shrines and deities constituted another important element in the popular Hinduism of this period. By now Chaitanya definitely held a high pedestal among the gods most deeply venerated by the common man, and a section was devoted exclusively to his praise in many of the poetical works. Worship of Gauranga was early introduced by Advaita, Narahari Sarkar and Gauridasa of Ambuya-Kalna. Gopala or the child Krishna *(chhaoyal Kanai)* was another object of veneration. Ruparama Chakravarti also mentioned in his long list shrines dedicated to Krishnaraya (at Krishnanagara), Balarama, Svarupanarayana and Sobhachandra. He also referred with deep respect to (the shrine of ?) Abhirama Gosain at Vindhak, "never for a moment separated from Radha and Krishna". With reference to the shrine of Ramgopala at Goruti, he mentioned the interesting fact that young maidens danced there three times every day.

The numerous local deities were perhaps the most characteristic feature of mediaeval Bengali folk-religion. Among them Dharma occupied the place of honour. In the sections on '*Digvandana*' in the poetical works of our period Dharma almost invariably was first mentioned. Whatever the origin of the cult might have been, the conception of this god in our period bore

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traces of varied influences. He was described as 'invisible Dharma' *(Dharma nairakar)* and also,—almost in the same breath,—as a white-complexioned deity on a white seat. His identification with Vishnu is suggested by a line in Ruparama's work, wherein Vaikuntha is mentioned as his abode. The same work described Dharma as the Primeval Being *(Brahma sanatana)* from whom originated Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. He also appeared under different names, such as Bankura Ray and Yatrasiddhi (the god of successful journeys). As worshipped in W. Bengal in the twentieth century, the god is conceived as the Sun or Yama and often represented by a stone under a tree daubed with vermilion. The exact nature of this deity has been the subject of prolonged controversy. Dharma was once considered a relic of crypto-Buddhism. But the composite nature of the cult has now been proved quite conclusively.

Among the lesser deities, mention may be made first of Manasa or the snake-goddess, associated often with the *Sij* plant *(Euphorbia nivulia)*, whose worship is nearly as popular to-day as it was then. Next, there were such other female deities as Jayachandi, Melaichandi, Betaichandi, Kamar Budi and Jati Thakurani associated with various localities. Shashthi, or Shashthibudi, the goddess of offsprings, also appears in the *Dharmamangala* of Ruparama. In that varied pantheon of domestic and local deities, Panchananda or Panchu Thakur, the god of children's diseases, Ghantu or Ghantakarna, dressed in a shirt and sitting astride a pony, the god of skin diseases, Pir Kaluray, the crocodile god, all occupied positions of importance. Godlings of a somewhat non-descript character such as Jhakrai, Nalu of Neod, Guma of Paithan etc. also had their special niches.

The Smriti of Raghunandana, written in the earlier half of the 16th century, which regulates the life of the orthodox Bengali Hindu to-day and is generally supposed to have embodied the contemporary practices approved by orthodoxy, prescribes in its chapter on rituals *(krityatattvam)* the worship of some of these local deities. Manasa, who resided in the *Sij* tree, Ghantakarna, worshipped for the prevention of boils, Sitala, the small-pox goddess, Mangalachandika, the two-handed fair-complexioned deity, who prevented diseases and other evils and Sutikashashthi, the goddess presiding over births and resid-

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ing in the labour-room,—all had particular days in the year assigned for their worship. Nothing could prove more conclusively the complete acceptance of such deities by orthodox Hinduism.

Almost throughout the mediaeval period, many Muslim saints were venerated by the Hindus in Bengal. A large number of shrines was dedicated to such saints or '*pirs*', as they were called. The shrines of Subhi Khan at Pandua, Dafar Khan Ghazi at Tribeni, Bada Khan Ghazi at Risibati and Pir Ismail at Mandaran were holy to both Hindus and Muslims.

To the daily and periodical worship of numerous deities were added various rites, some performed with particular ends in view. Of these, many are still current, but some have become comparatively obsolete. In the month of *Jaishthya*, for instance, was performed the *Savitri Vrata* for the prevention of widowhood. On specified days in *Ashadha* would commence the *Chaturmasya Vrata* lasting four months. *Nagapanchami*, the fifth day of the bright fortnight in *Bhadra*, was an occasion on which images of snakes were worshipped. In the same month, '*arghya*' (spiritual offerings) was offered to Agastya, apparently in commemoration of his great departure to the south. On the morning following the night of *Diwali (Dyutapratipada)* dice and other indoor games were played,—the name suggests gambling,—and the results were supposed to indicate the player's fortune during the year to follow. Still very current in Upper India, the custom is less so in Bengal. On the fifth day of the bright fortnight in *Magha*, Lakshmi and Saraswati together (and not the latter alone, as is the practice now) would be worshipped. The worship of Madana 'in the *Damanaka* tree', '*salagrama*' or water with songs and music on the days of *Madanatrayodasi* and *Madanachaturdasi*, is another festival which has now become obsolete. This list of comparatively obsolete rites could be lengthened considerably. Some of these still appear in the Bengali almanac but these have nearly all fallen out of popular favour.

The religion and daily life of the common people, including even the educated, were dominated by superstition and fear of the supernatural. Magic and occultism were accepted as common facts of daily life. The poets of our period bowed respectfully to *Dakinis*, *Yoginis* and *Mukhdushis*,—supernatural spirits, not particularly benevolent, who might grace the pandal at the

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time of the recital of the *'panchalis'*. Kshemananda went a little further and wrote a few verses in honour of *Rakshasas* long dead, such as Ravana, Indrajit, Trisira etc., apparently in the belief that it was better to placate all and sundry. Measures were taken to save the new-born babe from the influence of *Dakinis* and *Sakinis* : still would the 'evil eye' often cast its baneful shadow on the young child. According to the most authoritative Smriti work of Bengal, a wide variety of 'unnatural happenings' *(adbhuta)*,—and the entrance of a crow or a wild fowl into one's house belonged to that dangerous category,—necessitated expiatory rites, death and loss of property being the only alternatives. The same work discussed in detail the necessity for abstaining from particular items of food on particular days. Raghunandana learnedly quoted from ancient texts to prove that a man who did not take molasses during *Chaturmasya Vrata* acquired a honeyed voice, while abstention from mustard oil during the same period led to destruction of enemies.

Black magic, it appears, was widely practised, and even those who did not make use of it, had a faith in its efficacy. Thus, for instance, the Vaishnava biographical work *Rasikamangala* naively told the story of a Kali-worshipper who with the aid of supernatural powers (*siddhavidya*) dug a tunnel for the rescue of a captive from a Mughal prison. *Vasikarana*,—i.e. rites meant to captivate hearts, recalcitrant or restive,—appears to have been very popular. The loving mother collected various charms,—which included such unusual articles as ropes tied through a buffalo's nose, entrails of snakes and biles of fish,—to ensure the marital happiness of her daughter. An ageing woman in her unequal competition with a young co-wife also sought the aid of such charms. Supernatural agencies were invoked for less innocuous purposes as well and, if we are to believe the evidence of *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, often with dire consequences. The ryots of Khuntaghat in Kamrup, the traditional land of sorcery,—we are told,—managed to get oppressive officers 'killed through witchcraft'. Muhammad Zaman Tabrizi was thus bewitched 'so that for two or three days he used to produce sounds of beasts' and soon died. In the Ahom system of augury, as described by Mirza Nathan, there was the same unmistakeable stamp of black rites.

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VII. The state of Islam in Bengal.

Our knowledge of the state of Islam in mediaeval Bengal, particularly during the period under review, is comparatively meagre. Still, it is possible to form some idea regarding its main trends from a study of the contemporary sources.

Passages in the writings of the Muslim poets of Arakan belonging to the mid-17th century indicate that at least the educated Muslims had a clear conception regarding the basic tenets of Islam, free from all its later accretions. The story of creation as told in the Islamic scriptures, familiar legends connected with the Prophet's life, accounts of the Islamic heaven and hell,—all these characteristic features of the original Muslim faith appear in the prologues of these romantic poems. The writings of Alaol begin with the praise of God and many passages in these introductory sections read very much like paraphrases of the Muslim confession of faith.

But even in the works of such learned Muslims well-versed in Islamic scriptures, influence of Hindu thought and belief is clearly noticeable. Alaol referred to idols as the gods of fools, to fire as the god of Brahmins, to holy men as gods of Yogis and to the Supreme Being (*'prabhu niranjana'*) of the Islamic faith, as the God of all gods. By admitting the plurality of lesser deities the poet obviously departed from the strict path of Islam and accepted a common belief of the Hindus. The same poet also gave evidence of his belief in a commonly accepted Hindu dogma regarding the nature of idols : a passage in his Padmavati described idols as being the mere shadows of God and implicitly identified Siva or Mahadeva of the Hindus with the true God of the Muslims. His works reveal throughout an intimate knowledge of Hindu mythology and scriptures and in describing a non-Muslim King of Yemen, he painted the picture of a Hindu court.

But Hindu influence evidently detracted little from the faith in the superiority of Islam. The scholars in Nayman's court,—in the story of Bahram's conversion to Islam as told by Alaol,—understood not the nature of God, despite their knowledge of Agama, Yoga and Tantra. Naturally Bahram at the end of his long quest was convinced of the superiority of Islam. Elsewhere the worship of the formless God was described in emphatic language as the only way to salvation.

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A notable trait of Muslim religious life of mediaeval Bengal was the influence of Sufi mysticism. Of the numerous Indian Sufi sects, at least seven are definitely known to have entered Bengal in different periods. These seven sects are the *Suhrawardi*, the *Chishti*, the *Qalandariyah*, the *Madariyah*, the *Adhamiyah*, the *Naqshbandiyah* and the *Qadiriyah*. Several of these sects had considerable influence during our period. Ashraf Khan, the *'laskar wazir'* of king Sri Sudharma of Arakan and the patron of poet Daulat Kazi, was a follower of the Chishti sect. The *Qalandars* or *Qalandariyahs* were apparently the most numerous. Of the several Muslim mendicant orders, the *Qalandars* alone were mentioned by name in the *Chandimangala* of Mukundarama. The author of *Baharistan* with his followers temporarily entered the fold of this particular sect at Dacca in order to defy the governor. The first protagonist of the *Qadiriyah* sect in Bengal was Shah Qamis of Baghdad, who died in 1584. Initiation of many followers is attributed to him and he is said to have had numerous *Khalifas* or representatives in different parts of Bengal. He was succeeded by Abdur Razzaq as the spiritual leader of the sect, but its subsequent history is very obscure. In the middle of the 17th century poet Alaol is known to have entered this order. The *Naqshbandi* sect was established in Bengal by Shaykh Hamid Danishmand, a disciple of the famous reformer Shaykh Ahmad Sarhindi, in or shortly after our period. The *Adhamiyah* or the *Khizriyah* sect was also perhaps not unknown in Bengal at this time. For, according to tradition, the observance of the annual festival of floating rafters (*'beda bhasan'*) associated with this sect had to be permitted by governor Muqarram Khan against his wishes.

The *Bauls* who during the 18th and 19th centuries became very numerous in Bengal are generally believed to have been partly a by-product of the Sufi movement. It is difficult to accurately ascertain the period when this sect first came into existence. But tradition usually traces it back to the 16th century and points to Nadiya as the place of its origin. The thoughts and ideas of this sect in the later stages of its development are familiar to-day, thanks to the numerous songs of nameless poets. But even when *Baul* mysticism assumed a coherent shape, the sect itself did not become anything like an

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organised brotherhood, the name being applied indiscriminately to vagrant mystics of all denominations who sang of and yearned for the 'man of the heart' (*maner manush*) and were slave to no laws of religion or society. One wonders whether the '*faqirs* indifferent to the world' mentioned in *Chandimangala* and those whom Abdul Latif saw at Ghoraghat belonged to this particular sect. But any definite conclusion on this point is not authorised by the available data.

Holy men and religious preachers were an influence in Bengali Muslim society then as always. In our period or perhaps a little later, Maulana Hamid Danishmand and Haji Bahram Sakka came to Bengal and settled in the Burdwan district. Bahram Sakka, to whom Akbar granted the village of Faqirpur, is credited with the conversion of a powerful Hindu ascetic, Jaypal. Hamid Danishmand established a *madrasah* at Mangalkot, the ruins of which may still be seen. Besides such more famous men of God, there must have been many lesser ones. The traveller Abdul Latif mentions one such,—Hawadha Mian of Bagha in the Rajshahi district who with his students and dependents set up a simple college. There they devoted themselves to study and religion having 'no concern with other people.'

A significant feature of Islam in Bengal was the growth of the 'cult of the preceptor' (*guru-vada*) among Muslims, perhaps due to Sufi influence. The example of the Hindus also might have contributed to this particular development. Such statements as 'darkness turns to light through the *guru's* grace', occurring in Alaol's works, sound very much like the Hindu adage describing the '*guru*' as the person who opens the eyes of the disciple, blinded by abysmal ignorance. But elsewhere in a typically Sufi spirit Alaol begged of the '*guru*' the cup filled with the wine of love. For such wine led to oblivion of one's self and union with the Eternal Friend.

Islam in Bengal in its popular form was something very different from the simple austere faith which emanated from Arabia. It was replete with elements which an orthodox Muslim might well consider un-Islamic or even idolatrous. Tombs of holy men who had served the cause of the faith at one time or other had acquired the status of shrines. People sought the intercession of the deceased saints to secure special

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favours from heaven. Mirza Nathan, for instance, took a vow to visit the shrine of Nur Qutb Alam at Pandua when his father fell seriously ill. On the latter's recovery, the son carried out the promise and held a great feast. At Kantaduar in the Rangpur district was the tomb of Shah Ismail Ghazi, the tales of whose exploits in holy wars inspired the heart of the faithful. Besides, there were the shrines of the numerous '*pirs*' venerated by the Hindus and Muslims alike and mentioned with great respect in the introductory sections of the mediaeval '*panchalis*'. In the evening the Muslims lighted candles at these shrines and prepared '*sirni*' which was to be offered there. Un-Islamic superstition was in fact carried much further. In the second half of the 17th century Thevenot, the French traveller, saw a *faqir* going from Bengal to Kabul measuring the road with his body in the company of a number of disciples.

The purity of Islam in Bengal was also sullied in this period by conversions to the idolatrous faith. Vaishnavas who took the lead in thus converting Muslims achieved some success. Conversions of a different type were also not entirely unknown. Mirza Nathan informs us that during the Kuch campaign, "one of the expert musketeers . . . ., being lured by the Kuches, turned his face against the blessings of Islam. He entered into the fold of the infidels. . . . ."

Still, the average Muslim, as portrayed in contemporary literature, was both pious and orthodox. He offered five prayers a day, read the Quran and (making due allowance for poetic exaggeration) observed the Ramjan fast 'even if it cost him his life'. Thus orthodoxy tempered by popular practices and Hindu and Sufi thought seems to have been the key-note of Muslim religious life during our period.

VIII. The social and cultural milieu.

Besides religion, another facet of Bengali life which deeply influenced the culture of Mughal Bengal was the social and cultural milieu of the epoch. During the later days of the Sultanate period, Bengali culture found ready patrons in the Muslim kings and their officers. With the Mughal conquest, those happy days were practically at an end. Officers who now came to sojourn, not to stay, turned for recreation to such Upper Indian and outlandish music, dance, poetry and story-

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telling as they had long been familiar with. The poets who accompanied them were no translators of Sanskrit epics, but composers of flamboyant '*Jangnamas*' in Persian, celebrating their patrons' triumphs. So the creative artist and scholar in his quest for patronage could no longer count on officers or viceroys. The *zamindars* and chieftains as also the kings of the frontier states still offered material encouragement to native talent. The light which had died out at the provincial capital was rekindled in the kingdoms of Kamta-Kamrup, Tippera, Darang-Kachhad, Roshang, Mallabhum and the courts of some *bhuiyas*. At the court of Musa Khan lived Sanskrit scholars like Mathuresa. The officers of the Arakan King kept salons where literature was studied and produced. Mukundarama lived and sang at the court of a Hindu *zamindar*. But, to be sure, the encouragement offered by petty *zamindars* and chieftains was poor compensation for the loss of the Sultans' patronage. A large section of the public however now came forward as the patron of poets and scholars. This was not an entirely new development, but the changed circumstances must have contributed to it to a considerable extent. The growing society of Vaishnava neophytes was now the audience to whom the Vaishnava poet and biographer addressed themselves. Authors of '*panchalis*' did not confine their literary activities to the courts of the chiefs alone, but went about singing and reciting their compositions in public gatherings. Navadvipa by now had developed into a great centre of Sanskritic learning. There, as also in less famous places, scholars lived and taught students often in affluent circumstances. Occasional land or cash gifts from the rich and presents from departing students were apparently their means of subsistence. Appointment as private tutors was another source of income.

The state of higher education was an important element in the cultural milieu of the period. The *tols* were centres of secondary and higher Sanskritic studies. There the average student began with the study of grammar and lexicon. A course of classical literature followed, the education being finally rounded off with at least a smattering of Navyanyaya. Philosophical studies in which Samkhya, Mimamsa and Vaiseshika featured prominently, constituted a higher discipline through which at least some did go. But the study of Navyanyaya was

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the rage of the day and students from all over Bengal and even distant parts of India flocked to Navadvipa for this purpose. Places like Santipura and Jaugrama flourished as lesser centres of Nyaya studies.

The Muslim poets and officers at the court of Roshang represented a wider culture. In the court of Ashraf Khan,—an officer of the Magh king who patronized Daulat Kazi,—were regularly read and discussed Arabic and Persian religious and literary works as also the products of such Indian dialects as Gujarati and Gohari. Alaol, perhaps the most versatile of the mediaeval Bengali poets, was a polyglot who knew Sanskrit, Bengali, Arabic, Persian and Hindi and was well-versed in Yoga-sastra, sexual science, music etc. Qureshi Magan, Alaol's patron, knew Arabic, Persian, Bengali, Burmese and Sanskrit and, like his protégé, also had a knowledge of music, drama, poetry and rhetoric. Viewed in this context, the fact that Roshang alone succeeded in throwing up a new and powerful art-form in the 17th century becomes easily understandable.

IX. Some significant trends in literature.

Literature, the most important product of Bengali culture during our period, was marked by a number of socially significant trends. Nearly the whole of it, as already mentioned, was religious in character. And as Vaishnavism was the most creative religious movement of the period, Vaishnava literature became, almost as a matter of course, its most significant cultural product. '*Padas*' or lyrical verses in Bengali and Vrajabhasha and '*kirtanas*' embodying the love-lores of Krishna and Radha were popular in Bengal even before the days of Chaitanya and had reached their perfection in the writings of Chandidasa and Vidyapati. Lesser men who often reached great heights carried on the tradition. To '*padas*' which expressed in ecstatic language devotion to Krishna and Radha, had been added a new type of lyric which sought to immortalise the devotee's veneration for Chaitanya. '*Padas*' in honour of Krishna and Chaitanya and '*kavyas*' telling the legends of the cowherd-god continued to be written in our period. The long list of '*pada*' writers who flourished during the latter part of the 16th and the early days of the 17th century includes the name of at least one considerable poet,—Govindadasa. But the great

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days of Vaishnava lyrics were definitely over. For even Govindadasa was a pigmy compared with Vidyapati and Chandidasa ; and he did not shine in comparison with lesser poets like Jnanadasa either.

It was in the field of Vaishnava biographical literature that our period saw the climax of a long process of growth. This particular literary tradition had a humble beginning in the nebulous lyrics of Chaitanya's immediate followers and first assumed an enduring shape in the writings of Prabodhananda, Kavikarnapura and Vrindavanadasa. It reached its climax towards the close of the 16th century. *Chaitanyacharitamrita* of Krishnadasa Kaviraja, the greatest product of Vaishnava biographical literature, was written in our period. The stock of Vaishnava biographers was enriched by a new theme in the first quarter of the 17th century : the life-stories of the great Vaishnava missionaries,—Srinivasa, Narottama and Syamananda,—now engaged their attention. Of the Vaishnava histories dealing with their lives, at least one,—*Premavilasa*,—was almost definitely produced in our period. Though these works are very valuable as source-material for contemporary history, their worth as literary products is less above question. A period of decline had definitely set in so far as literary merit was concerned.

With the rapid crystallization of Bengal Vaishnavism into a sect under the leadership of the missionaries from Vrindavana, the need for popular renderings of the higher philosophy and basic tenets of the system was evidently felt. Long passages in the *Chaitanyacharitamrita* had first attended to this need. In the early days of the 17th century Yadunandanadasa, Yadunatha Dasa and others translated into Bengali the Sanskrit works of the Vrindavana *gosvamins*, while some wrote short tracts on Vaishnava philosophy and Rasa-sastra on the basis of *Bhaktirasamritasindhu* and *Ujjvalanilamani*. These works constituted a practically new type and their literary quality is also reckoned high.

Associated with, but only partly a by-product of the Vaishnava movement, were the Sahajiya tracts which first appeared towards the close of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century. Except in rare passages, this type of literature never reached any high quality, but those produced

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during our period had at least a certain amount of decency and cleanliness of thought to their credit. The same cannot be said of the Sahajiya writings of a later epoch which became almost pornographic in character.

It was during our period and the one immediately following it, that some of the best specimens of another type of literature were produced. This type is generally known as '*mangalakavya*' or '*panchali*'. Poetical works embodying the popular legends connected with the local deities were first written in Bengali at least as early as the 15th century. From the last quarter of the 16th century onwards, production of such works increased considerably in volume. Of these numerous works those which can definitely be attributed to our period are all connected with the legends of Chandi or Ganga. Mukundarama, the greatest of the '*panchali*' poets, lived and produced his masterpiece during the troubled years following the Mughal conquest. The number and variety of the '*mangalakavyas*' increased during the latter half of the 17th century. But nothing was produced to surpass or even equal the work of Mukundarama in literary excellence. Here again the 17th century compares unfavourably with the 16th. Here too production did not reach any dead end; it even increased in volume. Works bearing the stamp of mediocre talent were written from time to time. But that genius which inspired the poetry of Mukundarama was conspicuous by its absence.

During the period which saw the consolidation and establishment of Mughal rule in Bengal on a firm basis, the work of translating the epics,—mostly in abeyance during the preceding years of trouble,—was once more resumed and brought to a fitting climax. The *Mahabharata* of Kasirama Dasa, perhaps the noblest work of translation in the Bengali language, was written in the first decade of the 17th century. Partial translations of the epics were also undertaken in this period under the patronage of the Kuch Bihar kings.

A development very different in character took place at Roshang in Arakan under the direct patronage of the courtiers of the Magh king. There the cosmopolitan culture of the officers' salons led to the growth of a secular romantic literature. The earliest work of this type was produced in the days of Nusrat Shah of Gaur and had for its theme the

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love-story of Vidya and Sundara. A very long period of inactivity in this sphere appears to have followed, until at Roshang the secular tradition in Bengali literature was revived in a fresh and attractive form. In the third or fourth decade of the 17th century, Daulat Kazi wrote his *Lor-Chandrani* or *Sati Mayna*,—a romantic love-story in verse,—on the basis of the original work of that name in Thet Hindi. Thenceforward there followed in Bengal a stream of secular romantic poetry which reached its high water-mark in the *Vidya-Sundara* of Bharatachandra.

X. Navyanyaya.

It was not her literature which gave Bengal a position of pre-eminence in India's intellectual life during the later mediaeval period. According to tradition, Vasudeva Sarvabhauma (cir. 1450-1520) brought from Mithila to Bengal Gangesa's *Tattvachintamani* towards the close of the 15th century and established 'the first great academy of logic in Nadia'. But the real founder of the Gaudiya school of Navyanyaya was Raghunatha Tarkika Siromani whose *Tattvachintamani-didhiti*, a commentary on Gangesa's work containing also a running criticism on the various topics of Nyaya, and *Padarthatattva-nirupanam*, a highly controversial criticism of the categories given in Vaiseshika, proved to be the great starting point of studies in neo-logic in Bengal. Raghunatha flourished in the first half of the 16th century. From his time to that of Gadadhara Bhattacharya towards the close of the 17th century, Navyanyaya in Bengal had a continuous history of unchallenged supremacy. The dates of the great *naiyaikas* who flourished during this century and a half cannot be accurately ascertained. But several of them are known, more or less definitely, to have flourished in the last quarter of the 16th and the first quarter of the 17th century. It was during this period that Ramabhadra Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya wrote his commentaries on Vaiseshika philosophy and on the works of Gautama and Raghunatha. Jagadisa Tarkalankara wrote, besides a number of commentaries, a work dealing with the doctrine of causality known as *Nyayadarsa*, *Sabdasakti-prakasika*, a grammatico-philosophical treatise and *Tarkamrita*, an original work on elementary principles. Bhavananda Siddhantavagisa

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is credited with a work on the philosophy of grammar, only a part of which has survived. The most outstanding Nyaya scholar of this period was Mathuranatha Tarkavagisa who was one of the 'big three' (the other two being Raghunatha and Gadadhara) in the realm of Navyanyaya in Bengal. Said to have been a pupil of Raghunatha, Mathuranatha achieved distinction through his commentaries on his master's *Tattvachintamani-didhiti*. The '*Mathuri*' commentaries, however, 'are not much appreciated by the scholars of Nadia' because they are 'very lucid and easy'.

During the first half-century of Mughal rule, the history of Navyanyaya in Bengal was one of continuous growth, marked not merely by the works of great scholars but by a multiplication of the centres of study as well. It was in fact towards the close of the 16th century that Bengal's position of pre-eminence as a centre of Nyaya culture was firmly established. But did this growth signify any upward movement,—vertical or even spiral ? Few indeed are in a position to answer that question, and none at least has yet faced it squarely. One may only note with surprise that the bulk of the product of Navyanyaya in Bengal consisted of commentaries, sub-commentaries and sub-sub-commentaries. Bengal did produce "a large number of original and independent treatises on different sections and topics of Navyanyaya. It is curious that the fame of Bengal rests not so much on these as on the commentaries. . . . Neither are the former, with the exception of a few, quite so popular as the latter." The bulk of the manuscripts of Navyanyaya so far discovered are copies of commentaries, not of original works. This is as much true of the period under review as of those that followed or preceded it. It would be impertinent of any one but a specialist to comment on the worth of Navyanyaya as an intellectual product. But the opinion of Father Pons of Carical, a Jesuit missionary of the 18th century who studied the subject with interest and respect, is well worth quoting. Speaking of Navyanyaya in 1740 he said that it was 'stuffed with an endless number of questions, a great deal more subtle than useful'. "It is a chaos of minutae", Father Pons proceeded, "as Logic was in Europe about two centuries ago. The students spend several years in studying a thousand varieties of subtleties on the members of the syllogism, the causes, the

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negations, the genera, the species etc. They dispute stubbornly on such-like trifles and go away without having acquired any other knowledge". If this was the true state of higher education in Bengal under the guidance of the *Naiyayikas*, then the layman must agree with Father Pons's opinion that Navyanyaya as a subject of study was 'a great deal more subtle than useful'.

XI. Sanskrit literature in Bengal.

Bengal's contribution to Sanskrit literature in our period in branches other than Nyaya, was less voluminous and significant than in the preceding epoch. The creative period of Bengali Vaishnava philosophy, theology, Rasasastra etc. which produced such a spate of works in the Sanskrit language, was already over. By the third quarter of the 16th century the Smriti writers of Bengal had also laid down their pen. The more famous of the Tantric compilations and treatises, which no doubt continued to be a formative influence, belonged to the same period. Nevertheless, a few Sanskrit works on a number of subjects are known to have been written during our period. Rudra Nyaya-Vachaspati composed three poetical works,— *Bhavavilasa*, *Bhramaradutam* and *Vrindavana-vinoda Kavya*,— one of which was an eulogy praising Bhava Singh, son of Man Singh. Visvanatha Siddhantapanchanana wrote a work on metres. But the total volume of such works was not considerable. Nor were these works in any way significant. They appear to be mere products of an old habit which still persisted, but had lost its innate vitality.

XII. Architecture, painting and music.

During our period, Bengal produced little that was either impressive or enduring in the field of arts other than the purely literary. Architecture has practically no history so far as the first half-century of Mughal rule in Bengal is concerned. Religious edifices of the Hindus and Muslims and castles or palaces of kings and governors were the forms in which the architectural talent of mediaeval Bengal usually expressed itself. No mosque or castle which can be ascribed to our period with any amount of definiteness has survived. The forts and bungalows described by Mirza Nathan at times in an appreciative language were often, like some fairy tale castle, built in a

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day, though only with mud and bamboo. Even in the second half of the 17th century, the governor's residence at Dacca, as Tavernier found it, was nothing more than an enclosure of high walls in the middle of which was 'a poor house merely built of wood'. In the district of Dacca, however, there are three small Mughal water-forts of an unknown date which may have been built in or near about our period. One of these is at Idrakpur or Munshiganj on the right bank of the Dhaleswari, the two others are close to Narayanganj on either bank of the Sitalaksha and known as the forts of Sonakanda and Khizrpur respectively. Built apparently for the purpose of keeping the Portuguese and Arakan pirates in check, these small forts had nothing specially attractive or architecturally significant about them. Their purpose was purely utilitarian, not decorative, and they were of the type 'so common along the creeks of Bassein and Salsette in the Bombay Presidency'.

The record of Bengali temple architecture during our period is also very poor. Following the organisation of Bengal Vaishnavism into a well-ordered sect and the simultaneous consolidation of Mughal rule, a large number of temples were built during the comparatively peaceful and prosperous years of the later 17th century. But the first half-century of Mughal rule saw very little activity in this direction. The building of a temple of the multi-towered type at Damrail in the Khulna district, now in a dilapidated condition, is ascribed to Pratapaditya's father. The temple of Malleswara in Vishnupur is dated 1618. Hardly of the Bengali style, this peculiar temple had a straight base for the roof, a plinth and a cubical shape like Orissan temples and a quarterfoil arch over the door-way. The Chaitanya temple at Guptipara, Hugli was also built in the days of Akbar or a little later and was of the *Jor Bangla* type (with doubled triangular roofs) of the simplest variety, having only one spire. The Palpara temple at Chakdaha, Nadia, also ascribed to our period, "is typical of the style prevalent in Lower Bengal, where . . . . the houses of the gods are closely modelled on those of their worshippers and show the same simplicity of ground plan and the same curved roof". This beautiful specimen is also marked by an economy and refinement of decoration, in which mythological scenes feature prominently. Besides such brick-built temples, there must

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have been others of wood like the one which Nathan saw at Jessore, remarkable for 'the height of its pillars, the beauty of its thatching and its nice workmanship'. The only conclusion which one may perhaps draw from such meagre data is that architectural activity during our period, though not vigorous, was not without a certain variety and the tendency towards baroque which characterised the temples of a later epoch was not yet markedly evident.

Our knowledge of Bengali painting in the period under review is even more meagre. Dineshchandra Sen published the reproductions of a number of paintings ascribed to the 17th and even 16th centuries. But it is difficult to ascertain how far these dates are correct. There are references in *Chandimangala* to painting and embroidery work having the ten incarnations, Puranic legends, flora and fauna for their themes. But unfortunately no specimens of such works have survived. In fact, nearly the entire history of mediaeval Bengali painting is shrouded in darkness. One may hazard some conclusions on the basis of a few specimens that have survived; but such conclusions are very likely to be mistaken. An illustrated Bengal manuscript of *Kalachakratantra*, dated 1445 A.D. (1503 *V.S.*) show a decadent imitation of earlier hieratic paintings, the figure-drawings being characterised by angular lines and representation of both the eyes in profile faces. The next definite landmark is provided by an illustrated *Harivamsa* MS. dated 1479 A.D. (1401 *S.E.*) in the possession of the Asiatic Society. The paintings on the wooden cover of this MS. represent the ten incarnations, various Puranic deities and scenes from Krishna's '*Vrindavana-lila*'. Though hieratic in character, these paintings with their greater technical imperfections and deeper emotional vitality represent a closer approximation to folk-art. A dark period follows until we again come across an illustrated *Bhagavata* MS. dated 1689 A.D. (1611 *S.E.*) found at Bhatpara. The numerous paintings contained in this MS. mainly illustrate the Bhagavata legends dealing with the life-story of Krishna. In many ways these are very similar to the '*Pat*' paintings of a later epoch, being characterised by conventionalised figure-drawings and heightened emotionalism at the same time. While the drawing in these illustrations show greater imperfection than before, there

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is a marked naturalism and spontaneity in the representation of animated scenes and animal life, so characteristic of Bengal's folk-art. If the three specimens noted above may be taken to represent the development of Bengali painting over a period of some two centuries and a half, then it would seem that there was a continuous progress from the hieratic tradition towards that of folk-art, and that our period saw one of the numerous stages in the history of this development. But such a conclusion, as already noted, can be nothing more than a probable conjecture in the present state of our knowledge.

An important development in the field of music took place in our period. The tradition of *kirtana* which received a great impetus from the great Vaishnava Master was developed and elaborated towards the close of the 16th and the earlier days of the 17th century. Of the four modes of *kirtana* developed in four different regions and known by the names of their places of origin as *Gadanhati*, *Reniti*, *Manoharsahi* and *Mandarani* the first at least dates back to the early years of the 17th century. The invention of this particular mode is attributed to Narottama Datta, one of the three great missionaries from Vrindavana. According to tradition, Srinivasa was the originator of the *Manoharsahi* and *Reniti* modes. *Kirtana* was not the only form of music which developed during this period. A considerable part of the '*panchalis*' was meant to be sung and the appropriate '*raginis*' for each such section were indicated. While most of the tunes thus mentioned are classical, there are also references to the popular tunes, *e.g.*, *Bhatiyali*, in Alaol's *Sapta Paykar* written in the second half of the 17th century.

XIII. Conclusions.

Seen from the view-point of cultural history, the first half-century of Mughal rule was but the continuation of the preceding epoch. Except for the beginning of a secular romantic literature towards the close of this period or perhaps a little later (the exact date of Daulat Kazi's *Sati Mayna* is not known), it saw the emergence of no new art-form. In religion, it witnessed the organisation of the Vaishnava sect and the origin of the Vaishnava Sahajiya. But the culturally creative epoch of Bengal Vaishnavism was practically at an end by the close of the 16th century. The Vaishnava authors continued to be

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prolific, but they no longer produced works in any way comparable to the writings of Vrindavanadasa or Krishnadasa. The post-Chaitanya Sahajiyas failed to produce even a mediocre talent. During the earlier half of the 16th century the religious and intellectual life of Bengal had throbbed with the intense activity of men of unusual stature. In that memorable epoch Chaitanya revitalised the cult of Bhakti, Raghunatha Siromani founded the system of Gaudiya Navyanyaya, Raghunandana re-wrote the Smriti and brought it up-to-date and Krishnananda Agamavagisa compiled his *Tantrasara*, still reckoned as the most authoritative work of its kind. By the time we cross the threshold of our period this forest-fire is reduced to a mild blaze. The works of Mukundarama, Kasidasa and Krishnadasa appear as the last three flashes illuminating that world of mediocrity. Even these works were not the products of any fresh renaissance. They only marked the final culmination of a long process of growth. Only in the field of Navyanyaya the Bengali intellect showed no sign of decline, but further developed the tradition bequeathed by an earlier age till it reached its climax towards the close of the 17th century. With this exception, the first quarter of the 17th century saw the beginning of an intellectual decline in Bengal. This decline, to be sure, ended in no catastrophic collapse. But, as surely, Bengali culture of the 17th century was only a poor show compared to that of the 16th.

NOTES ON AUTHORITIES

Section III. For the Vaishnava conception of *Bhakti* and their faith in its superiority, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita, adi lila,* I and VI, *madhya lila,* VIII and IX; *Premavilasa,* 88. For their adoration of Krishna's name, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita, adi lila,* III and VII, *madhya lila,* XX and *antya lila* III; *Premavilasa,* 48 and 148. For faith in the divinity of Chaitanya and his followers, see *Premavilasa,* 37, 168, 172, 200, 203, 212; *Chaitanyacharitamrita, adi lila,* I, III, and VI; *Chaitanya Bhagavata, adi lila,* II; *Srikhander prachina Vaishnava,* 8. For '*Gauraparamyavada*', and '*Nagaribhava*', see *Chaitanya chariter upadana,* 42-43 52-53; *Srikhander prachina Vaishnava; Lochanadasa,* 87, 89, 102-103, 118 and his '*padas*' in the Appendix, 222 ff. and 263-80. For belief in miracles, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita,* 107-8, 118-19, 121, 193, 194, 306; *Lochanadasa,* 44-46, 49 etc.; *Premavilasa,* 181, 199. For belief in the universal right to salvation, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita,* 72, 244, 288; *Premavilasa,* 116, 171; *Rasikamangala,* 2, 22, 151 etc. For modification of caste ideas, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita,* 238; *Rasikamangala,* 58, 151, *Premavilasa,* IX, 44, 58, 116, 151, 171, 199. For the asocial character of Bengal

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Vaishnavism see *De*, 119-20 and his section on "Ethics of Bengal Vaishnavism"; *Premavilasa* (Berhampore edition), 122-25. For the identification of Vaishnava saints and leaders with Radha's female companions, see *Premavilasa*, 168, 172 and 203. For Vaishnava emotionalism, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 192, 195, 197, 287, 467, 539 etc.; *Premavilasa* (Berhampore edition), 113, 188 etc. For the Vaishnava ideal of character, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 62, 119, 386, 586; *Premavilasa*, 148. For instances of their intolerance, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 68, 80, 99, 120, 125, 139, 183, 219, 225-26, 257, 273, 292, 309, 392, 416, 480, 586, etc; *Premavilasa*, 107-108, 147, 148, 156, 196-97; *Rasikamangala*, 92, 97, 102, 136. For the element of toleration in Vaishnava religious beliefs, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 72, 392, 473, 474, 484. For the Vaishnava faith in the superiority of '*madhurya*', *ibid.*, 224, 280, 378; *Premavilasa*, 126, 148. For conventional interpretation of the milkmaids' love for Krishna, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 223-24.

Section IV. For an account of the early Sahajiya works, see *Post-Chaitanya Sahajiya cult*, 202-203. For the Sahajiyas' belief in the Vaishnava origin of their system and their respect for Vaishnava saints see *Sahajiya Sahitya*, 118-24, 148, 154, 156-57; *Rasakadamba*, 3, 83, 85. For exposition of '*prakritibhajana*' in Vaishnava works, see *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 213; *Premavilasa*, 123 ff; *Obscure Religious Cults*, 145-46. For the exposition of the same idea in *Rasakadamba*, see 49-54. For Sahajiya cult in its final form, see *Obscure Religious Cults*, 144-70. For their ideas in the early stage, see *Sahajiya Sahitya*, 96-8, 107, 108, 136 ff, 146-51, 155, 158-60, 179, 186, 190. For interpretation of '*visuddha-sattva*' and '*suddha-sattva*', see *Obscure Religious Cults*, 166. For '*svakiya*' ideal in Sahajiya texts, see *Sahajiya Sahitya*, 118. For Sahajiya injunctions regarding the secrecy of their practices, see *Sahajiya Sahitya*, 153, 156-57, 189, 190. For their use of veiled language, see *ibid.*, 126, 159, 164 etc. For Yogic-Tantric influence, see *ibid.*, 96, 154, 164. For Sahajiya attitude to orthodox Vaishnavas, see *ibid.*, 127, 154.

Section V. Many of the standard works and compilations relating to Tantric ideas and practices are ascribed to the earlier half of the 16th century or to the decades immediately preceding the Mughal conquest of Bengal. Among these some of the more important are Krishnananda's *Tantrasara*, Brahmananda's *Saktananda-tarangini* and *Tara-rahasya*, Purnananda's *Saktakrama*, Sarvananda's *Sarvollasatantra* (ascribed to the 15th century) etc. As ideas and practices of Bengal Tantricism are known to have remained more or less the same throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the account given in the present work is based on the Tantric writings mentioned above as also on those produced during the period under review.

For an account of mediaeval Bengali Tantric works, see C. Chakravarti, *Introduction to the catalogue of Sanskrit Mss., VII (Tantra) in the collection of R.A.S.B.*; also article on 'Sakti worship and Sakta saints of Bengal' in the *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II. For the philosophy of mediaeval Bengali Tantricism, see *Saktananda-tarangini*, 1st and 3rd *ullasa*, *Tara-rahasya*, 2; *Sritattvachintamani*, I., 62, 70-71, 84, XVI, 106-13; Introduction to *Sarvollasatantra*. See *ibid.* for exposition of the fundamentals of Kula-chara. For the eclecticism of Pasvachara texts, see *Saktananda-tarangini*,

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73-4; *Sritattvachintamani*, V, 1-10; *Tantrasara*, 309-93: For the importance of the '*guru*' and account of the external rituals, see *Saktananda-tarangini*, 35, 58-64; *Sritattvachintamani*, II, 5, 36; *Tantrasara*, 22-4, 30-56, 57-108, 111-55. For Tantric 'inner worship', see *Sritattvachintamani*, VI; *Saktananda-tarangini*, IV, 82-100; *Tantrasara*, 156 ff., 545-60. For the typical practices of Kulachara, see *Tararahasya*, 4-5, 14-16 and *Syamarahasya*, IV, VIII, IX. For the spread of these practices in the 18th century see *Dikshanachandrika*, f. 103b quoted in Introduction to *Sarvollasatantra*, 23. For Kulachara influence on Pasvachara texts, see *Saktananda-tarangini*, 30-32, 81, 90, 122; *Sritattvachintamani* XVI, 53, 93; *Tantrasara*, 666, 678, 713, 719, 1053-55. For reference to Sakta-Tantric practices in Vaishnava literature, see *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, 12; *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 119. For '*abhicharas*' and Tantric occultism, see *Tantrasara*, 756-59, 766-83, 847, 855 ff., 1009 ff, 1045-47 etc. For Sakta-Tantric attitude to caste, see *Tararahasya*, 12, 34; *Saktananda-tarangini*, 34-8, 286; *Syamarahasya*, 87-8, 92; *Sarvollasatantra*, XXI. For Sakta-Tantric attitude to *Vaishnavas*, see *Saktananda-tarangini*, 286-88, 298; *Premavilasa*, 10; *Rasikamangala*, 13, 72, 74.

Section VI. The account of Hindu folk-religion is based mainly on *Chandimangala*, 1-6, 9-10; *Dharmamangala*, 1-10, 12-17; *Manasamangala*, 6-9, 11-12; also see *Madhyayuge Vangla o Vangali*, 37-43. For Durga-*puja*, see, *Chandimangala*, 82; *Manrique*, 1, 73, *Raghunandana*, *Krityatattva*, 504. For Dharma worship in present times and analysis of the nature of the cult, see *Burdwan District Gazetter*, 57; *Howrah District Gazetteer*, 42; *Vangla Sahityer Itihasa*, 492-94; *Obscure Religious Cults*, 297-307 and introduction to *Dharmamangala*. For admission of local godlings into the orthodox pantheon, see *Raghunandana*, *krityatattvam*, 502, 510, 511, 513. For the '*vratas*' etc., see *ibid.*, 499, 501, 503, 507-509 etc. For the influence of superstition, see, besides the '*panchalis*', *Rasikamangala* 24; *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, 105; *Raghunandana*, 501, 517. For popularity of black magic, see *Rasikamangala*, 166; *Chandimangala*, 151, 167-68; *Baharistan*, 146b, 222b, *tr.*, I, 273-74, II, 486.

Section VII. For the state of Islam in this period, see *Vange Sufi Prabhav* and *Purva Pakistane Islam*. For the different aspects of Muslim attitude, see *Padmavati*, 1-4, 150-51, *Sapta Paykar*, 1, 3-4, 14-15, 18-19, 31. For references to Sufi orders and Bauls see *Chandimangala*, 103, 195; *Arakan Rajasabhay Vangala Sahitya*, 118-19; *Baharistan*, 60a; *tr.*, I, 150; *Stewart*, 264; Abdul Latif's Travels in *Bengal: Past and Present*, 1928. For veneration of '*pirs*' and Muslim superstitions, see *Baharistan*, 15a-15b; *tr.*, I, 42-3; *Risalat-us-Shuhada*, *J.A.S.B.*, 1874; *Chandimangala*, 102; *Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, 94-5. For conversions to Hinduism, see *Baharistan*, 112a-112b; *tr.*, I; 235. For the average Muslim's orthodoxy, see *Chandimangala*, 102.

Section VIII. For Persian '*Jang-namas*' written in Bengal, see *Baharistan*, 23b, 55a, 106b, 173a, etc; *tr.*, I, 70, 138, 224, 348 etc. For patronage of Bengali literature in frontier Kingdoms and the *bhuiyas*' courts, see *Vangla Sahityer Itihasa* 309-13; *Madhyayuge Vangla o Vangali*, 20-21. For recital of '*panchalis*' in public gatherings by the poets, see *Dharmamangala*, 21. For centres of learning, courses of study and the

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scholars' income, see *Chaitanya Bhagavata, Madhyakhanda,* VII; *Rasikamangala,* 33, 37-8; *Dharmamangala,* 18-19. For the culture of the Arakan court see S. Sen's article in *Visvabharati Patrika,* VII, 137 (extract from Daulat Kazi's *Sati Mayna); Padmavati,* introduction, VIII; *Arakan Rajasabhay Vangala Sahitya,* 34.

Section IX. The analysis of the main trends in Bengali literature is based on the standard works of Dr. D. C. Sen and Dr. S. Sen, and a study of the major literary productions of the period. Some of the conclusions are my own.

Section X. The account of Navyanyaya is based on *History of Indian Logic,* 461-89; M. Chakravarti, 'History of Navyanyaya in Bengal and Mithila', *J.A.S.B.,* 1915; C. Chakravarti 'Bengal's contribution to Philosophical Literature in Sanskrit', *Indian Antiquary,* 1929; D. C. Bhattacharya, *Vanglar Sarasvata Avadana.*

Section XI. For Bengal's contribution to Sanskrit literature in this period, see M. Chakravarti's article, *J.A.S.B.*, 1915, 286-87.

Section XII. For mud-forts, see *Baharistan,* 55a, 114b, 148a etc.; *tr.,* I, 138, 242, 278 etc. For the viceroy's residence, see *Tavernier,* I, 128. For the water-forts, see *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India,* 1924-25, 93-94 and plate XXXI (b and c). For mediaeval Bengali temples, see M. Chakravarti's article in *J.A.S.B.,* 1909, 141-62; *Cunningham's Report,* VIII, 150; *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India,* 1920-21 and plates VI and VII (a); *Baharistan,* 56a; *tr.,* I, 138-39. For paintings, see plates in *Vrihat Vanga,* II, 637 ff.; *Chandimangala,* 74-6. The MS. of *Kalachakratantra* mentioned in the text is in Cambridge (*Addl. MS. 1364*); photostat copies of some of the illustrations are in the possession of the Asiatic Society. The Bhagavata MS. dated 1689 is in the possession of Sri S. K. Saraswati of the Asiatic Society. For the music of the period, see *Vangla Sahityer Itihasa; Vanglay Sangiter Itihasa* and K. N. Mitra's *Kirtana.*

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CHAPTER V

THE ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

I. The social classes.

One may, following Moreland, classify the various elements which constituted mediaeval Bengali society broadly under two heads : the producing and the consuming classes. Such a division fails to take note of the fact that the producing classes were at the same time the consumers of the bulk of the commodities produced in the country. But in view of the comparative insignificance of the consuming classes in the productive activities of the period, this classification may be taken as a practical basis for our study.

The *zamindars* and the higher government officials constituted the uppermost strata of the consuming classes. Moreland commented on the absence of any independent aristocracy, distinct from the official classes, in Mughal India. But whatever the conditions in Upper India might have been, in Bengal the *zamindars* and the Rajas did constitute an independent aristocracy for all practical purposes. Even those chiefs who had become *mansabdar-jargirdars* of the empire, suffered little change so far as their position vis-a-vis their own estates were concerned. Even the *Ain-i-Akbari* recognized the existence of the Bengal *zamindars* as a distinct class and mentioned that there were '*zamindars* of three classes' (i.e. castes) in *sarkar* Fathabad. The law of escheat to which the Mughal officers were subject did not, it appears, apply in case of the Bengal *zamindars* who had accepted service under the emperor. When Musa Khan Masnad-i-Ala passed away, his son succeeded to the estates of the deceased almost as a matter of course and no question of escheat did arise.

The *mansabdars* or imperial officers who came to Bengal in the wake of the Mughal conquest appear to have been recruited almost exclusively from among non-Bengali elements, both

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Indian and non-Indian. Except for the *zamindars* who were formally drafted into service and were often required to participate in campaigns, we do not hear in any place of Bengalis being actually given *mansabs*. Nor did the officers,—whose services were transferable,—settle down in Bengal. So the official class throughout our period was nothing more than a body of foreigners who came to this province only as sojourners and went back at the end of their terms of service. During their stay in Bengal they were given *jagirs* which they actually administered or assignments on revenue in the collection of which they occasionally participated.

The high officers did not all belong to the same category. In the *Baharistan*, there are repeated references to the distinction and clashes of interest between the *subahdar's* men and the imperial officers. Apparently, the *subahdar's* men were *mansabdars* placed under the viceroy's authority, while the 'imperial officers' were those sent directly from the court or under imperial orders with commissions in the province. Though perhaps the latter's status was higher and imperial ordinances were issued from time to time to safeguard their interests, the governor's patronage secured for the former a position of comparative advantage.

The financial position of the officers was not always an easy one. Collection from the ryots in their allotted *jagirs* often involved considerable difficulties. Payment of the assignments on revenue was neither regular nor secured without wranglings. The presents which an officer had to send from time to time to the *subahdar* or the imperial court involved almost ruinous expenditure. The laws of escheat encouraged extravagance,—though a son occasionally inherited a part of his father's property,—and Nathan's father, for instance, left behind at his death hardly enough to cover the expenses of his funeral.

Viewed from the standpoint of the ryots or that of the economic life of the period, the highly placed men under the *zamindars* and local chiefs,—mostly natives of the province, both Hindus and Muslims,—occupied a position similar to that of the *mansabdars*, except for the fact of their being permanently settled in this land. The designations by which some of them were known suggest considerable status. Thus Nathan mentioned the '*Peshwas*' of Musa Khan, while Manrique referred to the

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'*Mapatras*' (*Mahapatras*) or 'controllers of the Royal estates' in Midnapore. The terms of service under which the *zamindars*' officers were employed are not known. It is highly probable that lands were assigned to them, for land-grants were the rule of the day and even the imperial officers parcelled out *jagirs* among their subordinates for the latter's maintenance.

Numerous classes of subordinate officers and clerical staff constituted an important element in Mughal officialdom. The contemporary sources bear witness to the presence of such lower officers and clerks in Bengal in large numbers. Of these, mention may first be made of junior *mansabdars*, whose exact status cannot be ascertained. Then there were the *ahadis* or gentlemen-troopers who had failed to secure a '*mansab*'. A characteristic feature of Mughal bureaucracy, the *ahadis* however are mentioned only once in the *Baharistan* and that in connection with Shahjahan's brief period of usurpation. One wonders whether this evidence of silence indicates the presence of only a few officers of this class in Bengal. The clerical staff was surely much more numerous. Our sources refer to the *mutasaddis* or accountants, the *mustawfis* who signed and sealed, "the transactions of sales and cheques of soldiers and servants" and *amils* or revenue-collectors. The *karkuns* and *qanungos*, local staff connected with the collection of revenue, were figures as familiar in Bengal as in the other *subahs* of the empire. Besides such clerical staff, a host of petty officers constituted an integral part of the administrative machinery. Amongst these were the *tarafdars* whose exact functions cannot be ascertained, and the *sazawals* (who cannot be exactly termed officers), entrusted with such general functions as bringing soldiers together or recalling officers from their *jagirs* in time of emergency. Besides such employees with specific designations, the officers had under them a large body of subordinates who assisted them in their multifarious duties. These subordinates were vaguely described as the officer's men. Some of them, however, had specific functions. Thus, for instance, at least some of the high officers had their own *diwans* and *bakhshis*, and sent special agents to the provincial courts to look after their interests. For the elephant stables in charge of the officers there were special '*faujdars* of the elephant stable', elephant-keepers, *mushrifs* (inspectors) and *tahvildars* whose status was semi-menial.

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A class, at least as important as the officers and subordinates from the numerical point of view, were the soldiers in the employ of the government (or rather of the officers) and the local chiefs. It is difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty the number of soldiers who were sent from Upper India or those who were locally recruited. But in view of the constant wars and rebellions which characterised the first half-century of Mughal rule in Bengal, it seems pretty certain that the soldiery constituted no negligible proportion of the consuming classes. In the statistical tables of the *sarkars* of the Bengal *subah* given in the *Ain-i-Akbari* a certain number of cavalry and infantry men is mentioned against each *sarkar*. These numbers almost surely do not refer to the actual strength of the Bengal army, but gives a rough estimate of soldiers who could be locally recruited in case of need. Still, with regard to Bengal it is difficult to accept Mr. Moreland's suggestion that the local 'foot-soldiers' were only 'the peasantry of a particular area . . . . impressed temporarily when military operations were in progress'. It appears that a substantial proportion of the local recruits consisted of skilled archers and infantry men,—the Kuch *paiks* and Afghan *naqdis* for instance,—who constituted something like a military caste. That at least some of them were paid by the government,—a fact questioned by Moreland,—is proved by the reference to the allowances of the *paiks*, at times 'made an addition to revenue' payable by the ryots. The soldiers maintained by the *zamindars*,—the men of the cavalry, the infantry and the fleet,—also must have been considerable in number. To soldiers, regular or temporarily impressed into service, one may add the camp-followers. They, however, do not seem to have constituted a distinct class, but were perhaps only a section of the local people who took to a lucrative occupation at the time of war.

The relation of the services and the soldiery with the productive activities was very tenuous. This is particularly true of our period when the government is known to have undertaken no work of development. Collection of revenue and maintenance of law and order were then the only functions of the government and its employees. In so far as a certain amount of security was essential for normal economic life, the classes mentioned above had an indirect importance in the work

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of production. Beyond that their contribution in this respect was practically nil.

This was even more true of the servants and slaves who were to be found in large numbers in the establishments of the officers, the local chiefs and the Portuguese residents of the country. The services they rendered to their masters tended to no essential needs but were in the nature of luxuries. One of the chief motives in keeping a large menial staff was display. Many of the servants, however, had specific functions allotted to them. Pelsaert mentioned the horse-keeper, the carter, the *farrash* (steward), the *masalchi*, the *mahut* and a few others who, to be sure, were figures as familiar in the officers' households in Bengal as in those of Agra. To this list may be added the names of the *mir manzil* (superintendent of household), the *mir saman* (in charge of goods), *sawkials* and *kahars* (palanquin-bearers) mentioned in the *Baharistan*. It is however interesting to note that though the officers kept a numerous host of menials, the household of a rich Hindu merchant as described in the *Chandimangala* apparently did not have more than a few servants. The menials were all very poorly paid and often there were heavy deductions from their wages.

In the economic life of the country, the slaves occupied a position in many ways similar to that of the servants. But there were some important differences. In the first place, the slaves, unlike the servants, were articles of commerce. The slave-hunting expeditions of the Portuguese, who captured entire villages, seized pilgrims and campaigned regularly every year for such purposes, are too well known to need repetition. The Mughal officers emulated their example with success. Thus slaves were taken by the plundering army from villages in Rani Maydan's territory. Expeditions were sent to the hills to provide slaves for Nathan's sister. The numerous references to the capture of villagers during campaigns perhaps imply activities of a similar type. The slaves thus captured were of course not only exported to other parts of India and foreign countries, but also freely sold and purchased in local markets under deeds of sale sealed by the *Qazi*. Many of them were turned into eunuchs, of whom there were three types: *Sandal*, *Badami* and *Kafur*. These eunuchs often rose to positions of importance,—a thing which no ordinary menial could hope to

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do,—in the services of the local chiefs. Nathan mentioned, for instance, Khwaja Sandal, the chief of Raja Satrajit's regiment. The slaves of the Portuguese at Goa, Linschoten informs us, made 'all sorts of confections and conserves . . . , much fyne needle works' etc. The master maintained his own family as well as the slaves on the proceeds of the sale of such articles. Cabral describing the Portuguese of Hugli mentioned 'their black women, their clever cooks, their dancing girls, their confectioners, their seamstresses and so on', who also perhaps functioned in the same way as the slaves at Goa,—a surmise which is supported by Schouten's reference to a half-caste trader of Hugli whose slaves 'had to earn their living and serve him or give him a part of their gain'. Thus at least a section of the slaves appears to have taken part in productive activities of some sort.

Mr. Moreland emphasized 'the comparative insignificance of the middle classes' in Akbar's India and drew attention to the absence of such important professions as journalism, education and law. He, however, admitted that 'this statement is possibly less applicable to Bengal than to other parts of India', and confessed his failure to speak with authority on the subject due to his ignorance of the Bengali language. As a matter of fact, Bengal in the period under review had a numerous middle class to which belonged a variety of professions. This class, of course, was different in character from its modern counterpart. But that fact in no way indicates its 'comparative insignificance' nor does Bernier's comment that 'a man must be either of the highest rank or live miserably' apply to Mughal Bengal.

At the top of the social ladder among the professional classes in Bengal stood the Brahmins,—teachers, scholars and priests,—'reverenced by the common natives more like Gods than men'. Many of them were no poor scholars but enjoyed great wealth and prestige. The Brahmin scholars seem to have adopted teaching as their usual profession. In Bowrey's time, they were 'dispersed into most villages in the Kingdom' and had 'the tuition both of the Gentues and the Orixas'. The local Rajas and *zamindars* gave lands and presents to the Brahmin teachers, some of whom stayed at the chieftains' courts and regaled the latter with discussions on the scriptures. To a less respected class belonged the professional priests who went about

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worshipping the household deities of their disciples and received in return payments in cash and kind. Many of the Brahmins, in the opinion of the Europeans of a later period, were 'great astrologers'. The Brahmins, called '*grahavipras*', discussed the scriptures and prepared horoscopes for the children. Then, there were the '*ghatak*' Brahmins or marriage-brokers who earned a living not merely through honest negotiation of marriages, but often also by a sort of blackmail casting aspersions on the family of those who did not properly reward them.

The Vaidyas or native medicine-men, who constitute a separate caste in Bengal, occupied a position of considerable importance. Mukundarama has immortalised the cunning ways and extortionate demands of his contemporary native physicians in a well-known passage. The *kaviraja's* stock with the Muslim officers was very high indeed, some of them being even considered 'Messiah-like'. Others, again, were no mere physicians but sought to reinforce their knowledge of medicine with a mastery of the astrological science. Among the Muslims, the Mullas, the teachers in the *maktab* and the *hakims* were the counterparts of the Brahmin priests, scholars and Vaidyas. Two special sources of the Mulla's income are mentioned in the *Chandimangala*: Muslim marriages and slaughter of fowls and animals. The *hakims* did not apparently enjoy very high status and were considered less expert than the Hindu physicians in the art of healing.

A section of the professional classes consisted of poets, musicians, dancers and the like who earned their living mainly by entertaining the rich *zamindars* and officers and, to a lesser degree, the public in general. Many of the famous Bengali poets of the 16th and 17th centuries—Mukundarama, Ruparama and Kshemananda for instance—were directly maintained by local chiefs. The '*bhats*' or minstrels were similarly patronized by the *zamindars*. The Muslim officers of the empire coming from outside Bengal also patronized a few non-Bengali poets who composed '*Jangnamas*' in Persian. Among the dancers and musicians patronised by the officers there were, however, both Bengalis and non-Bengalis, the '*luliyanis*' and '*kalawants*' being very popular with the Mughal bureaucrats. Closely associated with this class were the postitutes who lived in segregated

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quarters. "Most governors", wrote Bowrey, ". . . doe allow that any woman (Moore, Gentue or Ouria) unmarried may lawfully turne common Whore, ...and take her habitation among other whores in small villages separated from any married folkes houses, paying so much per mensem to the Governor . . . ." Besides, they also had to dance and sing before the governor and the *kotwal* without any remuneration.

Mukundarama also mentioned a number of poorer professions. Among these, there were besides the washermen, the barbers, the tailors, the '*hajams*' (Muslim barbers who circumcised the children), the ferrymen (*patni*) and the like such special professions as grass-cutters, drum-beaters (to which belonged many aboriginal tribes, *e.g.*, Pulinda, Kirata, Kol) and the Maratha quack-surgeons who operated in cases of cataract.

Quite a large number of men, both among the Hindus and the Muslims, lived on begging in the name of religion and thus constituted a parasitical class. Among the Muslims, there were besides the mendicant orders many individual recluses, some of whom even belonged to noble families. Among the Hindus, there were the *Kapalikas* and the professional *Vairagis* who lived on begging. To such a parasitical class also belonged a large number of Vaishnavas who secured a living from rent-free land-grants and performed no services in return.

Among the producing classes in the country, the peasantry was of course the most important as also the most numerous. The majority of the peasants appear to have been small-scale farmers who tilled their own land. It is a surprising fact that in the long list of the various classes of people given by Mukundarama, the landless agricultural labourer as such is nowhere mentioned. The '*beruniyas*' mentioned several times appear to have been a class of unskilled labourers who might be called upon to discharge a variety of functions such as construction of dams and the cutting down of forests. But purely agricultural functions are nowhere mentioned in their connection. These facts indicate that landless agricultural labourers,—even if they constituted a class,—occupied a position of comparative insignificance. The rich farmer who had his lands tilled by a large number of labourers is also conspicuous by his absence from Mukundarama's list. The vague account of the rich ('*mahajan*') Vaisya who constantly worshipped Krishna and

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followed agricultural pursuits may refer to the big farmer, but this indication is in no way conclusive.

Our knowledge of the manufacturing classes is much fuller. The workmen at Agra, as Pelsaert informs us, followed hereditary occupations. The conditions prevalent in Bengal till only the other day and the reference to various manufacturing groups in the *Chandimangala* in a way which suggests that they were mutually exclusive castes indicate that Pelsaert's remark is also applicable to Mughal Bengal. Among the manufacturing classes the weavers and the workers in metal, *e.g.*, the blacksmiths, the goldsmiths (who were also dealers in gold) and the manufacturers of bell-metal utensils (*kansari*) were the more important. In the long list given by Mukundamara jewellers, carpenters, and manufacturers of conch-shell articles (*sankhavanika*) also appear along with the potter, the paper-manufacturer (*kagaji*) and the cloth-dyer (*rangrej*). Then there were the '*teli*' who manufactured oil and the makers of various food-stuffs such as the confectioner (who did not merely make sweetmeats, but also manufactured a more important commodity, sugar), and the '*pithari*' or cake-maker. Certain articles of daily need were produced by the '*chamars*' who made leather goods and the '*doms*' who manufactured wickerworks. Besides, there were also the producers of certain luxury articles, *e.g.*, the flowerman, who made wreaths and bouquets and the painter of '*pats*' who hawked about his wares. Later Tavernier saw at Dacca and Patna more than 2,000 persons occupied in the manufacture of stone toys meant for export.

Certain classes of artisans appear to have been either directly dependent on or closely associated with the provincial government and its officers. There are repeated references in the *Baharistan* to the workmen and labourers of the navy. Elsewhere, the same work refers to the government '*karkhanas*' and their workers. The specific purpose of such '*karkhanas*' is not very clear. Only in one place we are told that furnitures were among the articles manufactured there. Lastly, there were the unskilled labourers or '*beruniyas*'. They, as already noted, were employed in a variety of functions and usually worked under group-leaders. Beyond this little is known about this interesting class of people.

The commercial classes occupied a position of great

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importance in the economic life of the period. At the top of this class stood the big merchants and traders, both Hindus and Muslims. The Vaisya merchants, we are told, travelled from place to place in their boats on commercial errands. The Muslim merchants are also known to have owned crafts with which they traded along the coast. As middlemen, the merchants carried on a considerable volume of trade with the Portuguese, money being advanced to them by the Europeans for purchase of commodities. The '*paikars*' or wholesale dealers who later supplied raw silk to the English factories apparently belonged to the same class. The richer merchants acquired 'stupefying wealth'. The *Kshatris* of Dacca, Manrique informs us, had amassed 'such quantity indeed that, being difficult to count, it used commonly to be weighed'. The merchant-princes of the same city advanced hundred thousand rupees to Nathan at a short notice.

The shopkeepers and the smaller businessmen, some of whom were 'even well-to-do', constituted another element of the commercial class. Many of the manufacturers sold their own wares and thus partly belonged to the same class. But there were others who only kept shops and often sold only some particular ware or other. Thus a class of people dealt in oil manufactured by others. Besides, there must have been small stores of consumers' goods so familiar to-day, but such multi-purpose shops are nowhere mentioned in the contemporary sources.

The hawkers and pedlars of various wares belonged to one of the lowest rungs of the social ladder. Mukundarama mentioned specifically the vegetable-sellers in local '*hats*', the '*chandalas*' who hawked about salt and certain fruits, the meat-sellers and the '*baitis*' who not only manufactured musical instruments but also sold mats in the town. Such classes constituted the poorest element in society.

II. Class relations.

The information supplied by our sources about the relations between the various classes is meagre but not without interest. The chiefs and *zamindars*, as already noted, often acted as patrons to certain professional classes. They, along with other moneyed classes, provided a market for luxury goods produced

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in the country and thus their indirect relation with the artisan class was one of great importance. A sentence in the *Chandi-mangala* even suggests that the manufacturers of costly cloths were given rent-free lands. So far as the commercial classes were concerned, the freedom of their economic activities was hampered by the various imposts levied by the *zamindars*. The servants of the *zamindars*, officers and traders all joined hands in exploiting the poor shopkeepers. Their wares were taken away on payment of nominal prices,—at times nothing at all was paid,—and there was hardly any provision for the redress of their grievances. The relations between the *zamindars* and the peasantry have been discussed elsewhere in this work. Here it may however be recalled that as rent-receivers and money-lenders responsible to nobody, the *zamindars* freely exploited the peasantry and levied extra imposts ; but the fear of mass exodus and the natural slackness of *zamindari* administration acted as checks on oppression.

The officers, like the chiefs, patronized certain professional classes, *e.g.*, *kavirajas*, *hakims*, poets, dancers, musicians and astrologers. Their high standard of living and the expensive presents which they locally purchased and sent to the viceregal or imperial courts no doubt acted as an incentive to certain types of production. By occasionally drafting into service for piece-work certain classes of artisans, *e.g.*, carpenters and black-smiths, they also provided employment though only in a limited sense. The relationship between the merchants and the officers was even more direct. The officers, in the first place, sought to extort as much money as they possibly could from the traders. The merchants, again, provided loans for the officers, as the latter were frequently in want. The '*beparis*' also acted as ration-suppliers to the armies and followed the latter at the time of campaign. Pelsaert, in describing the economic condition of Upper India, referred to the adverse effects of official oppression on agricultural production. His statements, it appears, are at least partly applicable to Bengal as well. For, as Manrique informs us, in case the Hindus failed to pay the heavy taxes levied on them, their wives and children were sold as slaves by auction. The officers violated the honour of the ryots' women practically with impunity while their *piyadas* subjected the peasants to extortion. The services of the common people were

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requisitioned apparently without pay. Still the ryots on the officers' estates were generally loyal, though they tried to evade payment of their dues whenever possible. The relations between the officers and their subordinates were also none too happy. Non-payment of wages was a constant source of discontent and occasionally led to desertion. Petty subordinates were treated with scant courtesy : *tarafdars* who drew up accounts unfavourable to an officer might even be flogged. The servants were often considered no better than chattels. The *khidmatgars* who could not be taken away from a besieged fort were ordered to perform '*jawhar*' (i.e., self-immolation).

Moreland's statement about the smallness of the market for the services of the professional classes is not true of Mughal Bengal. The priests had a big clientele. The Brahmin teachers seldom lacked students. The Vaidyas who enjoyed a high reputation perhaps had a proportionately large practice. The astrologers were called in to prepare horoscopes for children. And, if one accepts Mukundarama's statement about the Kayasthas being all educated men, the educated middle class was surely not very small. The student of Bengali literature of the 16th-17th centuries may even wonder whether the educated middle class of that period was in proportion very much smaller than its modern counterpart. It was no doubt poorer, and the level of its education and culture proportionately lower. Still at a time when Navadvipa had attained the status of Hindu India's intellectual capital, when the study of Navyanyaya flourished along the banks of the Ganges and schools were set up in every other village, and when even the young son of a poor household like Ruparama Chakravarti went to distant places in quest of learning, literacy and secondary education could not have been limited to an insignificant part of a total population, much smaller than that of to-day.

III. The state of agriculture.

The bases of economic life in that epoch were, of course, in many ways similar to those which were characteristic of this province until the beginning of the industrial era. Agriculture, the pivot of Bengal's economy, was limited and primitive in character. Small-scale farms cultivated by the owner were the typical units of agricultural production. The implements used

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were the same old plough and cattle and the scarcity of capital induced the peasant to borrow from money-lenders or *zamindars*. The ideas regarding ownership of land do not seem to have been very clear. The lands of the *khalsa sharifa* belonged in theory to the emperor. Regarding the lands parcelled out as *jagirs* and those under the *zamindars*, there was no such clear-cut theory. But there, as elsewhere, the ryots enjoyed a certain amount of security of tenure. If they occasionally left their lands, the desire to evade extortion was usually their main motive. As Moreland pointed out, 'the process of disentangling the conception of private right from political allegiance' had not yet started, and in the literature of the period the tenants in the *zamindars*' estates are invariably described as '*praja*' or subjects.

The proverbial fertility of Bengal's soil is mentioned in the writings of the contemporary travellers. The chief product was rice, of which there were so many varieties that, according to Abul Fazl, "if a single grain of each kind were collected, they would fill a large vase". Lentils, oilseed, mustard, wheat, long pepper and cotton were among the other important products of the soil. Besides, there were also the fruits so familiar to-day, *e.g.*, pine-apple, jack-fruit, mulberry, banana, mango and oranges. Mention should also be made in this connection of some less common products, e.g., round pepper and opium, 'the best in India'. The prices of agricultural products are said to have been very cheap, but in the absence of any specific data we are not in a position to form any precise idea on the subject.

IV. Piscaries and forests.

Throughout the mediaeval period fishing was an occupation paying enough to provide employment for several distinct classes of people. Among these there were the '*jaliya Kaivartas*' whose main occupation was fishing and the Muslim *Kabaris* who sold fish. The estimated dues on the produce and piscary of rivers, tanks etc. mentioned in the *Ain* in connection with two of the Bengal *sarkars* (Bazuha and Sonargaon) also indicate the flourishing state of the Bengal fisheries.

The forests provided among other things timber for masts, and valuable aloe-wood. The woods of Chandikan yielded 'great store of Ware' while '*golas*' were established in the

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Sundarban forests for preparation of lac. As elephants were of vital importance for purposes of communication and warfare, arrangements were regularly made for capturing them. Hill-ponies or *tangan* horses were found at Ghoraghat. Talking birds such as '*bhangraj*' and '*maina*' caught in the forests were also in great demand.

V. Industrial production.

In the field of industrial production, as all indications go to show, the artisan system was prevalent. Explaining the system in brief, Moreland wrote "that the management of business had not been separated from the work of manufacture, and .... production was carried on by artisans without superior capitalist direction". But advances made by middlemen often supplied the need for capital. For large-scale enterprises 'organisation had to be brought specially into existence' and the services of contractors were requisitioned. The description of settlement of Gujarat in *Chandimangala* mentions the arrival of groups of labourers under individual leaders. In the *Baharistan* also there are references to the '*sardars* of the workmen' and the '*sardars* of the elephant-catchers'. But these may also suggest the existence of something in the nature of permanent labour-organisations under individual leaders. The existence of the contract system is however proved by an explicit reference in the *Baharistan*.

In this period Bengal was rich in the variety of its manufactures. Its most important products were textiles. Different types of cloths,—such as cotton cloth, *tasser* and grass cloth,—were manufactured. Special varieties, e.g., *Sahonnes*, *Hammomes*, *Tzinde*, *Patta*, *Sallalo*, *Bastan*, *Kassa*, *Sarampuras*, *Satpassas*, *Gomsas*, *Beatillias* 'and a thousand like names' are also mentioned in our sources. The extent of the weaving industry in Bengal can be guessed from Pelsaert's statement that in "Chabaspur and Sonargaon with the surrounding villages and indeed as far as Jagannath, all live by the weaving industry, and the produce has the highest reputation and quality". The herb cloth or grass cloth, mentioned frequently in the contemporary sources, enjoyed great popularity. It was 'dearer and more esteemed' as also 'much fayrer than the silke.' Pieces or articles made of this stuff were beautifully embroider-

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ed, sometimes mixed and woven with silk. Among the textile goods manufactured in Bengal there were also the quilts, 'stichte with birds, beastes or worke very thicke'. The famous Bengal *muslins* had already made their mark as one of the finest products of Indian craftsmanship. In the *sarkar* of Sonargaon, the *Ain-i-Akbari* informs us, was produced 'a species of muslin very fine and in great quantity'. The best products of the Bengal looms secured a price, very high even according to modern standards. At Malda, Nathan bought "a rare piece of cloth for himself at a cost of Rs. 4,000/-". In this period Bengal also had a considerable silk-industry. Large quantities of raw silk, as also silk skeins and cloths were produced.

Several other industries also occupied an important position in Bengal's economy. Manufacture of ships and boats, for instance, had assumed the proportions of a large-scale industry. The boats were of a great variety and at Dacca in the days of Tavernier, the entire river bank exceeding two *kos* in length was inhabited for the most part by the carpenters who built galleys and other vessels. The products of a number of handicrafts, e.g., conch-shell articles, toys, ornaments etc., were also greatly in demand. Fitch saw at Bakla women wearing silver hoops and ornaments made of silver, copper and ivory. Bowrey, writing nearly a century later, described the gold and silver ornaments of Bengal, some set with diamonds and pearls. Tavernier, as already mentioned, found at Dacca and Patna more than 2,000 persons occupied in manufacturing stone toys (including tortoise-shell and sea-shell bracelets) and coral beads.

Manufacture of certain food-stuffs, many of which were exported to other parts of India, was an important feature of the industrial life of the period. Sugar, base and refined, *'gur'* or jaggery, butter and oil, various conserves of fruits, palm wine etc. are mentioned in the contemporary sources as the common products of Bengal. To these may be added a mineral product, salt, which was rather scarce in those days. Lastly, it is interesting to note that the *Ain* mentions the existence of iron mines in *sarkar* Bazuha. But we have no means of knowing to what extent these mines were worked or exploited.

VI. Bengal's commerce.

A growing commerce was the most notable feature of

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Bengal's economic life in this epoch. In discussing its character, we have to take note of certain factors which profoundly influenced it. Thus, in the first place, the coming of the Portuguese had revolutionized commercial activities in this province by throwing open the Asian market to Bengal goods and by snatching away from the Arabs and the local merchants the control of coastal and overseas trade. The Bengali or Indian traders continued to have a share in this trade, but only as lesser partners. A second factor was the policy of the government, or rather its officers, to subject the merchants,—specially the native ones,—to extortion. The unfortunate consequences of such a policy were described graphically by Shihabuddin Talish. The limited amount of available specie was a third factor influencing the character of commerce. Pyrard de Laval and Bowrey noted the use of shell as token currency in daily transactions. In Kuch Bihar, Fitch informs us, almonds were used as small money and though Abul Fazl wrote of the rents being paid by the peasants in *mohars* and rupees, the use of coins must have been somewhat restricted in scope. The surprisingly low price of commodities was surely related in some way to this scarcity of coin as also to the low purchasing power of the people.

Though circumscribed by such factors, commerce flourished in Bengal on an almost unprecedented scale due to the richness and variety of Bengal's products, the comparative peace secured by the Mughal administration and above all, the activities of the European traders. The products of Bengal were now sent to various parts of India by land and river routes. Up the river Ganges the Bengal traders,—the Portuguese in particular,—carried to Patna cotton goods, silk, saltpetre and jewelleries from this province. Silk, musk and civet of Bengal were available at Agra at reasonable rates. Lead, tin, ivory, quick-silver and vermilion brought from Bengal sold very well at Gujarat. Bengal vermilion also had a good market at Ajmere. Tippera merchants came to Dacca to buy coral, yellow amber, tortoise-shell and sea-shell bracelets, articles which were also exported to Assam. Besides these, Bengal also sent to different parts of the country rice, lac, opium, beeswax, civet, long pepper, various drugs, moist sugar and slaves or eunuchs. In return it imported salt, opium, lead, carpets etc. from Agra,

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cotton from Patna, shawls from Kashmir and coarse silk and bad quality gold from Tippera.

Bengal at this period also had a flourishing coastal trade with lands as far as Ceylon and Portuguese India on the one side and the Kingdom of Pegu on the other. Her cotton cloth and rice were regularly exported to 'India', Ceylon, Pegu and lands further beyond the seas. Besides, Masulipatam received from this province regular supplies of silk and *muga* till Dutch piracy in the Bay and political disturbances interfered with this peaceful commerce. To Ceylon were sent provisions of victuals as also pavilions for beds, wrought quilts, fine Calicut cloth, pintadoes and other fine works, opium, raw and wrought silks etc. Portuguese India was supplied with slaves, victuals, rattan and the like. Pegu provided a good market for fine Bengal calicoes.

The Portuguese, on the other hand, brought to Bengal shell from the Maldives, conch-shells from Tinnevelly coast, pepper from Malabar and cinnamon from Ceylon. Ceylon also supplied pearls and elephants. The Ceylon elephants were procured through a barter system in exchange of the goods supplied from Bengal. Pegu supplied gold, silver and costly jewels.

Bengal in this epoch also had a considerable foreign trade both by land and sea. The volume of sea trade under Portuguese control was much larger than that of the overland trade. Traders came from Bhutan to buy coral, amber etc. Fine *muslins* put into hollow bamboos were carried by merchants to Khorasan, Persia, Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries. A return current must also have been there, though the available information on this point is rather meagre. Tavernier noted that in return for the gold and silk sent to China, Tippera received silver which was minted into coin.

Bengal's overseas trade in this period was mostly in the hands of the Portuguese. We have noted elsewhere the nature and volume of this trade and its implications in the life of the country. Here it may be added that the native traders had not completely lost their hold over the maritime commerce. John Davis the Navigator saw a settlement of Bengali traders at Achin in 1599. Bowrey found at Balasore and Pipli some 20 ships of considerable burthen belonging to the governor and

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some merchants which sailed every year to Ceylon, Tenasserim and the Maldives. Bernier noted the fact that Indians, despite their cowardice, made long voyages from Bengal to Tenasserim, Achin, Malacca, Siam, Macassar, Mocha, Bandar-Abbasi and other places, depending on the course of the wind. Thus the growing overseas trade contributed directly to the prosperity of the native mercantile community. But the fact that the English and Dutch could not penetrate into Bengal before 1633 deprived the province in this period of the benefits which their trade had already conferred on certain other parts of India. The local markets registered immediate reactions to the coming of the European traders in the shape of increased prices. Besides, a more permanent rise in the price-level also appears to have resulted. Cesar Federici paid half a larine (a larine=about 12s 6d) for a cow in 1565 and was supposed to have paid double the usual price, while in the eighties of the 16th century, according to Linschoten's estimate, the price for the same had risen to one larine.

In describing the opulence of Bengal towards the close of the 17th century, Bernier referred to the popular proverb that there were a hundred gates for gold to enter Bengal, but not one for its exit. That gold did pour into the country, specially in the latter half of the 17th century, is an unquestionable fact. But it reached the pockets of a comparatively small section and the picture of the poor ryot's life which emerges from contemporary literature is one of dire distress. Against the oppression of *zamindars* and officials he had practically no redress but for exceptional measures like flight or open rebellion. In case of natural calamities he had no means of sustenance excepting the money-lender's assistance, which was granted on no easy terms. Taken altogether, the economic condition of the masses presented a dark picture which accords ill with the impression of plenty and prosperity often conveyed by the travellers' accounts.

NOTES ON AUTHORITIES

Section I. For Moreland's analysis of the classes in Indian society, see *India at the Death of Akbar*, 63 ff. For the position of the *zamindars* as independent aristocrats, see Chapter I of the present work ; also *Ain*, II, 144; *Baharistan*, 289a; *tr.*, II, 680. For the clashes of interest between the

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subahdar's men and the imperial officers, see *Baharistan*, 103a, 105b; *tr.*, I, 214, 220. For the officers' financial difficulties, see *Baharistan*, 77b, 235a, 271a-271b, 283a; *tr.*, I, 203; II, 522, 628-29, 663; 665. For the position of the chiefs' employees, see *ibid.*, ib, 289a; *tr.*, I, 29, 680; *Manrique*, I, 22. For subordinate officers and clerks, see *India at the Death of Akbar*, 73-82; *Baharistan*, 5a, 101b, 166b, 167a, 171b, 185a, 200a, 214a, 172b, 312b; *tr.*, I, 13, 210, 329, 330, 384, 429; II, 461, 632, 744. For number and importance of soldiers, see Moreland, *op. cit*, 74-5; *Baharistan*, 146b, 164b, 181a. 187b, 188a, 236b, etc.; *tr.*, I, 273, 321, 370, 390, 392; II, 527 etc.; *Ain*. II, 130; *Chandimangala*, 104, 113, 114; *Madhyayuge Vangla o Vangali*, 33-7. For the servants and slaves, see *Pelsaert* 61-3; *Baharistan*, 64a, 173a, 195a, 281b, 284b-285a, 311b; *tr.*, I, 163, 348, 412; II, 657, 668, 741; *Chandimangala*, 147, 195-96; *Ain*, II, 135; *Bernier*, I, 238; *Manrique*, I, 73-4, 92; *Linschoten*, I, 186; *Cabral in Manrique*, II, 405: *Schouten*.I, 151. For the middle class, see Moreland, *op. cit*.. 26-7, 83n; *Bowrey*, 205-206; *Chandimangala*, 103, 104; *Baharistan*. 65a, 140b, 142b; *tr.*, I. 167, 256, 262. For artistes and poorer professions, see *Chandimangala*, 100, 103-107; *Baharistan*, 23b ff., 106b; I, 70, 224; II, 512; *Bowrey*, 206-207. For the parasitical elements in society, see *Baharistan*, 285a; *tr*.. II, 668. *Chandimangala*, 104. For the agricultural classes see *ibid.*, 32, 100-101, 104. For the manufacturing classes, see *ibid.*, 103, 106-7; *Pelsaert*, 60, *Tavernier*, II, 266-67; *Baharistan*, 6b, 156, 312a, 323a-323b, etc.; *tr.*, I, 20, 43 etc., II, 742, 770. For the unskilled labourers, see *Chandimangala*, 91. For the commercial classes, see *ibid.*, 104, 106; *Pelsaert*, 63; *Manrique*, I, 33, 44, 428, 441-42; *Master*, II, 317; *Baharistan*, 276b; *tr.*, II, 644.

Section II. For the relations of officers and chiefs with other classes, see *Pelsaert*, 47; 62-3; *Chandimangala*, 106, 107; *Bowrey*, 194; *Manrique*, I, 53-4; *Baharistan*, 9b, 10b, 49b-50a, 65a, 106b, 173b, 217a, 244b, 264a-264b, 276b, 302a etc.; *tr.*, I, 29, 34, 121-22, 167, 224, 349; II, 469, 549, 607, 633, 715 etc.

Section III. For the peasants' dependence on the money-lender-zamindar, see *Chadimangala*, 101, 102. For agricultural products and fertility of soil, see *Bernier*, II, 309-10, 315; *Linschoten*, I, 94; *Ain*, II, 134; *Bowrey*, 132-33; *Ain*, II, 134, 135; Abdul Latif's Travels (*Bengal: Past and Present*, 1928); *Fathiyya-i-Ibriyah*, 13-14.

Section IV. For fishermen and piscaries, see *Chandimangala*, 103, 107; *Ain*, II, 151, 152. For forest products, see *Ain*, II, 135, 136-37; *Manrique*, I, 406-407; *Purchas*, X, 206; *Baharistan*, 47a, 274a; *tr.*, I, 248; II, 638.

Section V. For money advanced by middlemen, see *Chandimangala*, 31. For organisation of large-scale enterprises, see *ibid.*, 91; *Baharistan*, 11b, 49b-50a, 291b; *tr.*, I, 35, 1221; II, 687. For textile manufactures, see *Letters Received*, I, 74; *Factory Records*, I, 84, 103, 112, 193, 253; *Linschoten*, I, 96; *Early Travels*, 28; *Pelsaert*, 8; *Ain*, II, 136; *Baharistan*, 15b; *tr.*, I, 43; *Travels of Peter Mundy*, II, 362. For other industries and manufactures, see *Tavernier*, I, 128; II, 266-67; *Manrique*, I, 35-6; *Early Travels*, 27-8; *Roe*, 308-309; *Linschoten*, I, 97; II, 23-6, 49, 79-80; *Bowrey*, 132; *Ain*, II, 136; *Baharistan*, 2b; *tr.*, I, 5.

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Section VI. For the limited supply of specie, see *Purchas*, IX (*Pyrard*), 560; *Bowrey*, 200; *Early Travels*, 25; *Ain*, II, 134. For prices, see *Cesar Federici, Purchas*, X, 137; *Linschoten*, I, 35; *Bernier*, II, 311; *Bowrey*, 133-34. For inland commerce, see *Travels of Peter Mundy*, II, 154-56; *Factory Records*, I, 195; *Bernier*, II, 309-10, 312-13; *Letters Received*, II, 181; III, 66; *Tavernier*, II, 23, 266-67, 273, 275; *Manrique*, I, 428-29; II, 395; *Purchas*, X, 206; *Haklyut's Voyages*, VI, 25-6; *Linschoten*, I, 96. For coastal trade, see *Early Travels*, 28, 34, 43, 44; *Manrique*, I, 29, 446; *Haklyut's Voyages*, VI, 400-401; *Linschoten*, I, 97; *Letters Received*, I. 264; III, 25; *Bowrey*, 181; *Cesar Federici, Purchas*, X, 136. For foreign trade, see *Manrique*, I, 56-7; *Tavernier*, II, 275; *Purchas*, II, 322; X, 137; *Bowrey*, 179; *Bernier*, II, 305; *Linschoten*, I, 94; also Chapter II of the present work.

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CHAPTER VI

MODES OF LIFE

I. The course of a Hindu's life from birth to death.

The way of life of the average Bengali in the 16th and 17th centuries was in many ways similar to that of his modern counterpart in the villages except, of course, for such far-reaching changes as have been introduced by western influence and the inroad of industrial civilisation. In the older way of life, religion,—its ritualistic aspect in particular,—had a greater part to play and the life of the average Hindu as seen through our sources looks like an even monotonous path marked at regular intervals by a series of religious rituals. Many of these rites described in contemporary vernacular literature or prescribed in the Smriti work of Raghunandana are still current. Many others, however, are now obsolete.

The traditional way of life claimed the Bengali Hindu child for its own as soon as the fact of his conception became known. A series of ante-natal rites followed, in which orthodox practices sanctioned by ancient texts mingled freely with local customs. First, the rite of '*garbhadhana*' was to be observed with '*homa*' and '*sraddha*', seeking the blessings of the gods and the manes for the newly-conceived baby. At the beginning of the third month after which, according to ancient Hindu theory, the child in the womb made its first movements, the expectant mother went through the rite of '*pumsavana*' in her husband's company and offered prayers to Prajapati and other gods. '*Simantonnayana*',—a rite of which the chief features were a particular mode of coiffure and the use of vermilion,—followed, the last of antenatal rites being '*soshyantihoma*' to be observed when the labour pain began.

Surprisingly enough, practically none of these rites prescribed in Raghunandana's Smriti are mentioned in contemporary literature which describes other popular observances. This, of

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course, does not prove that the former had already become obsolete, but only indicates that the local customs were more popular than scriptural rites. Among such popular customs was, '*sadh*' an occasion on which the expectant mother was feted and presented new clothes.

From the birth of a child onwards there followed another series of rites. While orthodox Raghunandana describes the '*jata-karma*' or birth-rites accompanied by traditional '*vriddhi-sraddha*', a truer picture is provided by the '*mangalakavyas*'. On the birth of a child, a fire was lighted with straws taken from the thatching and Shashthi, the goddess of children, was worshipped, the skull of a cow being first placed at the door of the labour-room. Such rites were obviously inspired by belief in magic and the supernatural and were meant to avert the influence of the 'evil eye'. Shashthi was worshipped again on the sixth day after the birth ; other rites followed on the eighth, ninth and twenty-first day, on one of which occasions lentils were distributed among the relatives. The child was given a name in the first month. After that the mother left the labour-room and had her ritualistic bath.

The '*annaprasana*', or the child's first rice-taking, was an important ceremony then as it is now. This ceremony represents a typical compromise between local customs and orthodoxy. For as Raghunandana pointed out, though the rite was not mentioned in Gobhila-sutra, it was prescribed by a later authority and hence was to be observed according to one's family custom. The other notable rites associated with child-hood were '*chudakarana*' (shaving the head), '*karnavedha*' (piercing the ears), '*vidyarambha*' (initiation into studies) and '*upanayana*' or initiation into religious life. Of these, the first two as distinct religious rites are practically obsolete to-day.

The young boy then went to school where he might study as a day-scholar or resident boarder. A day-scholar belonging to a rich family apparently paid his teacher at a monthly rate. After the student had learnt the letters and the elements of grammar, he went through a course of study which included classical Sanskrit poetry with commentaries, rhetoric, poetics and Nyaya. The account given of Srimanta's education in the *Chandimangala* is obviously an idealized picture ; still it is no doubt true that many young men rounded off their education

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with a vocational training in medicine or astrology. '*Purva-paksha*' or discussions between the teacher and the taught was an important element in the educational method of the period.

Descriptions of marriage and family life cover many pages of the Bengali '*panchalis*'. Early marriage was very much in vogue, though perhaps young men usually did not marry before the end of their educational career. But a man who had to remain unmarried till twenty-five was reckoned almost an old bachelor. For girls, seven was considered to be the ideal age for marriage and the age-limit of twelve could be crossed only at the cost of grave social opprobrium. A girl of eleven was considered to be in an advanced stage of youth. The custom of taking bride-money (*kanya-pan*) was widely prevalent, though giving the daughter in marriage without taking it was considered to be a particularly meritorious act. Presents and even lands were given to the bridegroom, and a formal cash present to his father, but the dowry system in the modern sense of the term appears to have been less prevalent. Monogamy was the usual practice, as Manrique observed ; but polygamy was by no means uncommon. Even the beginnings of the later excesses of Kulin polygamy were also perhaps noticeable.

Marriage negotiations were undertaken by the professional broker or the friends of either party. With the '*adhivasa*' or the preliminary rite, the ceremony would begin in the bride-groom's house attended by music, dance and the eulogistic recitals by the minstrel. The presents from the bridegroom's party would be carried in a procession to the bride's house to the accompaniment of ritual songs sung by professional singers. In the bride's home, there would be hilarious scenes on the occasion of her 'spice bath' (*gandha adhivasa*), a preliminary rite, as women poured water on each other, a custom which was known as '*jalsahi*'. Bizarre practices followed, as the mother and well-wishers of the bride went out in search of charms to ensure the bride's happiness. A cow's skull would be placed in the compound in order to make the bridegroom as quiet as a cow in his married life. Then in the evening the bridegroom's party (supposing of course that we are speaking of rich men) started out in a gala procession with gorgeous palanquins, elephants, musicians and minstrels. A mock-fight between the bridegroom's party and the one sent to receive it appears to

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have been a part of the show. '*Stri-achar*' or reception by the women, still a familiar custom, also included rites specifically meant to act as charms. As regards the ceremony of marriage itself, it was very much like its modern counterpart and any detailed account of it would be superfluous. The same is true of the rites and functions after marriage, the only difference being that the guests invited to the bridegroom's house were given presents. Mention should also be made of another post-marital rite which has now become practically obsolete but was then celebrated with great gusto. This was '*pushpotsava*' followed by the 'second marriage' on the occasion of the young wife's attainment of puberty. Water-sports marked by hilarious scenes, not always within the limits of propriety, were the characteristic features of this rite.

The character of the average Bengali home and the socio-ethical ideas which influenced it, have not undergone any fundamental change in course of the last few centuries. The son's duty to his parents and the wife's duty to her husband were viewed almost as religious obligations. Widowhood was looked upon as a cruel curse which rendered life worse than death, while *Suttee* was extolled as a laudable practice. On the other hand polygamy, though quite current, was not favoured. Among other social ideas the great contempt in which childless men and women were held and the way in which the birth of daughters was deplored are particularly noticeable. The idea on sex morals was rather rigorous, and the danger of scandals was always there ; and scandal usually meant 'loss of caste'. The attitude to caste was, of course, more orthodox than it is at present. Brahmins, as noted elsewhere in this work, were looked upon as gods rather than men. Kulinism deeply influenced the thoughts and habits of the Bengalis, and giving a daughter in marriage to a person whose ancestry was not spotless from the view-point of caste would be a source of calumny. The tendency on part of lower castes to pretend to a higher dignity was common, as it is to some extent even to-day. Untouchability was a socially powerful custom and even men of the same caste would not interdine freely. The comparative purity of family history from the view-point of caste was taken into consideration in deciding whether a person could take his meals in the house of another member of his caste, and

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he in whose house all men of his caste could dine without hesitation enjoyed great prestige. Mere wealth was not enough to free the low-born from social stigma.

The joint family system must have been current in this period, though there are not many references to nor any detailed description of it in our sources. Ruparama Chakravarti, the poet of Dharmamangala, was the member of a joint family in which four brothers lived together, apparently under the guardianship of the eldest who even had the right to turn them out. But perhaps the system had not yet reached the grand proportions which became its characteristic feature in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the ideal household, the mother-in-law handed over the charge of house-keeping to the young bride who did the house-work under her directions, and spent the later years in dignified leisure. The old father retired from the daily business of life and turned to religious pursuits. At times he would depart to Benares and there await his end in the bosom of his faith. This happy picture was surely not true of all joint families. The mother-in-law and the husband's sister might often become a source of misery to the young bride. But the really unhappy home was one in which a worthless son-in-law, unable to maintain himself, had settled permanently. Quarrels between the mother and the daughter and constant bickerings were the usual lot of such families. The household of the polygamist was also a proverbial home of troubles. Aided by wily maid-servants, the god of quarrels here reigned supreme and in the mutual relations of the co-wives the possibility of free fights and fisticuffs was by no means precluded. The relations between co-wives were in some cases quite happy and the generous elder, when not listening to the counsel of maid-servants (to whom a house divided was a source of both pleasure and profit), might even shower kindness and care on the young co-wife. But such cases were rare and competition for the husband's affection with the assistance of powerful charms and magic formulas was the general rule in a polygamous home. No wonder that the girl who married into such a family was often considered lost.

Superstitions played a prominent part in the daily life of the average Bengali. Charms were used not merely to ensnare a restive husband but also to secure such other ends as the birth

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of a son or cure of diseases. The fear of the 'evil eye' was ever present in the minds of men and the young child was considered particularly susceptible on this point. People believed in all sorts of omens. The flight of a kite over one's head, a wood-cutter with bundle of woods, a crow sitting on a dry branch, a beggar woman begging for the half of a gourd were all supposed to be bad omens, while prostitutes, flower-vendors etc., were considered particularly auspicious.

The last wish of a pious Hindu was to die near the waters of the Ganges. To quote the words of Cesar Federici, "when any one is sicke, he is brought out of the country to the banke of the River, and there they make him a small cottage of strawe, and every day they wet him with that water". Thus the life of a Bengali Hindu ended, as it had begun, amidst religious rituals.

II. The life of the rich.

Our sources portray in glowing colours the life of the richer classes in that period. The aristocrats, the merchants and the more successful members of the professional classes all lived in great comfort and luxury.

The courts of the local Rajas and chiefs, who constituted the uppermost strata of Bengali society, reflected their wealth and power. The village headmen and the subordinate chiefs regularly assembled in these courts. There the court-scholar and the minister sat by the Rajah's side along with a number of pundits and the court-priest on seats of Bhutan rug and jute cloth. Professional '*pathaks*' or readers told stories from the Puranas and musicians sang to the tune of the *vina*, while the *patra* discussed financial matters with a bundle of papers in his hand. In and around the court also stood sentinel, the guards and armed soldiers of the chief.

The chiefs' seats of power as also the towns and cities of our period are described in some of the contemporary sources. The imaginary account of Ujani in *Chandimangala* reads very much like an idealized description of some real town, with a stone fort in the centre and bamboo stockades round it. Ghoraghat, the best *qasba* (village with market) in Bengal, according to Abdul Latif, had many beautiful mansions and delightful gardens erected and laid by the officers. Islam Khan built a large mosque in the middle of the bazar and some residences

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within the fort. Kuch Bihar as described by Shihabuddin Talish had 'flower beds in the streets and trees to both side of them'. Bowrey found Dacca, the new capital, to be 'an admirable city for its greatness, for its magnificent buildings and multitude of inhabitants', while Thevenot described it as a very narrow town with houses mostly of cane covered with mud. Bakla in the days of Ralph Fitch had fair and high-built houses and large streets.

The European travellers while praising the magnificence of some buildings do not mention the material with which these were built. The stone mansions described in Bengali literature do not seem to have existed in our period except as relics of earlier architecture or, oftener still, only in imagination. In describing stone temples Mukundarama inadvertently referred to straw thatchings, a fact which indicates the type of structure with which the poet was really familiar. Coming from a poet who lived in the court of a chief and was hence likely to know more about stone structures than most people, this erroneous description also proves the rarity of such buildings at the time. Brick buildings, specially those made of sun-dried brick, were less rare. These were plastered with lime mixed with cow-dung and finally coated "with still another composition made of herb, milk, sugar and gum" for smoothness and lustre. Most of the dwelling houses, however, were made of wood or bamboo. The local craftsmen achieved great excellence even with such materials. "Their houses are made of bamboos", wrote Abul Fazl, "some of which are so constructed that the cost of a single one will be five thousand rupees or more and they last a long time." The imperial officers stationed at Khagarghata constructed 'nice bungalows' of this type at Rs. 1,500.00 each, and the temple at Jessore which excited Nathan's admiration was also a wooden structure. Two types of houses familiar in Bengal are mentioned by Ruparama—'*Chauchala*' and '*Bangala*' or bungalow. '*Jaltungis*' or houses built on a raised platform in the middle of water-tanks were a luxury in which some indulged. And though Mukundarama's descriptions are full of imaginative exaggerations, the high walls (or stockades) round the palace, water-tanks with stone *ghats* and gates which appear in them no doubt corresponded to reality at least so far as the palaces of the Rajas and chiefs were concerned. Some merchants had

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beautiful houses "with big and commodious apartments and very clean reservoirs of water for bathing". But all rich men did not live in big houses. As Fitch noted, though many people in Sonargaon were very rich, the houses there were small and covered with straw with few mats round the wall and doors to keep out foxes and tigers.

The equipment and utensils in use even in a rich household were comparatively few in number and limited in variety. But costly materials often made up for the lack of variety. The *Chaitanya Bhagavata* contains a striking description of the outer room or reception room in the house of Pundarik Vidyanidhi, a rich Vaishnava. The master of the house sat on a costly bedstead decorated with brass-plates and covered with beautiful awnings. A bed with fine covers and silk pillows was spread on it and several water jugs, big and small, and a brass betel-pot were at hand, while two servants stood waving fans made of peacock's feather.

The interior of the house was also decorated more or less in the same manner as the outer room, the bedstead being the main piece of furniture. Broomsticks of peacock feather were used in rich homes to sweep the floor, on which mats often resembling 'woven silk' were spread. Mosquito curtains made of fancy materials with decorative patterns were hung and the bed was also lavishly decorated in other ways. Except for these, pots and jugs of various types, articles of daily use such as mirrors and combs and toys ('*chitrer puttali*') were about the only articles to be found even in a rich household, though perhaps some of these were really made of gold and other costly materials as is often mentioned. The rich often kept elephants. "But the Bengalis", to quote the words of Abul Fazl, "rarely took to horseback". Palanquins, often covered with rich cloth (*pater dola*), were the usual means of travel by land. The *sukhasan* or *sukhpal* was 'a crescent-shaped litter covered with camlet or scarlet cloth and the like', the two sides of which had fastenings of various metals. Chariots or carriages drawn by horses are mentioned by Mukundarama, while Ruparama referred also to camel-carts which must have been very rare in Bengal, if not altogether a figment of imagination.

In whatever way the life of the rich Bengali in our period might have been limited or circumscribed, the culinary art

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suffered from no lack of variety. The '*panchalis*' and the Vaishnava biographies give long lists of the dishes then taken, many of which have now become obsolete while others are still very common. Though Moreland questioned the view that supply of food-stuffs etc., was more plentiful in 17th century India than it is to-day, the fact remains that practically all the contemporary travellers wondered at the abundance of the good things of life in Bengal. Manrique saw at Hugli a surprising variety and abundance of food-stuffs. Fowls, castrated goats, veal, chicken, birds, many kinds of rice, *ghi*, milk products and sweetmeats, plenty of sugar and fruits were some of the stuffs he noted in his itinerary. It would be futile to mention all the dishes which appear in the long lists given in the Bengali works of this period. Herbs, vegetables and fishes cooked in different fashions and sweetmeats made of fruits, lentils and milk-products were the common items of food. In certain parts of the country the majority of the people were vegetarians living on rice, milk and fruits, though their meals too,—judging from the long lists in the Vaishnava biographies,—were in no way monotonous or limited in variety. Some sects, according to Manrique, even abhorred red vegetables and lived only on *Khichri* with a large quantity of *ghi*. At feasts they took costly Gujrati *Khichri* with almonds, raisins, cloves, mace etc. The reference, apparently, is to some extremist section of Vaishnavas. The Raja of Tamluk treated Manrique to a vegetarian meal consisting of stews of rice and herb, dishes with milk and vegetables cooked with much *ghi* and various sweets. The non-vegetarians used to take the flesh of certain animals e.g., wild boars and rabbits, which are either tabooed or rarely taken these days. The tabooed foods of the period included tame pigs, hens, eggs, and most of the domestic animals. The habitual dress of the upper classes consisted of short *dhoties* with no upper garments. But turbans were in use. The fashionable city-dwellers wore tussore *dhoties* and '*Khassa*' cloth. Well-to-do men also put on a '*chaddar*'. On festive occasions, men wore trousers, called '*ijars*' and a '*cabaya*' or long tunic of *muslin* after the Mughal style. The *ijars* were worn very narrow and long with plenty of lines and creases. There was a slight difference between Hindu and Muslim *cabayas*. The richer classes had actually adopted *ijar*, shirt (*jama*) and *cabaya* with turban as their

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habitual outfit. But most of them put on only white stuffs, and their turbans were smaller and their breeches shorter than those of the Muslims. They also wore stockings under Muslim influence. But these stockings, it seems, were of leather, for these were manufactured by '*chamars*' who generally made leather goods. It is not clear if leathern foot-wear of any other variety were worn, though there is reference to '*paduka*' in our sources, which may after all mean nothing more than wooden sandals. Ornaments such as golden ear-rings, necklaces, rings, bangles and armlets were commonly worn. As for toilet, men anointed their bodies with sandal-paste and put on '*tilaka*' marks.

Women's dress consisted of *sari* and a brassiére (*kanchali*). On ceremonial occasions an extra piece of cloth (*mekhala*) was wrapped round the upper part of the body, and rich ladies also put on *ijar* as an underwear. On festive occasions, silk and brocade were worn in profusion. Brassiéres were embroidered with varied designs, including scenes from mythological stories.

The ornaments worn by women were of a great variety. These were of gold, silver, shell and ivory, some being set with costly jewels, and coral. *Bauli* was worn covering the upper part of the ear, while *kundala* was the ornament for the lower part. A number of ornaments used in this period, e.g., *nakmachhi* for the nose, *pansuli* for the feet, *sapuda*, and *sateswari har* (necklace with hundred strings ?) for the neck etc. have now become obsolete. More common ornaments, e.g., jewelled ear-tops, golden wrist-bands (*vajuvandha*), ornaments for the hand such as *chudi*, *kankana*, *angad*, *tad* and rings, *nupur* for the feet, necklaces and the like were also much in use.

Upper class women also took great care of their toilet. They massaged themselves with '*narayana*' oil before bath and washed their heads with '*amlaki*' fruits. Bathing with water drawn from wells or tanks was a particular luxury (going to the river or tank for bath being the more common practice). Round the vermilion mark on the forehead a line would be drawn with sandal-paste, and a dot of collyrium put near it as a sort of foil to beauty. Pretty designs with '*kumkum*' and sandal-paste were also a part of the toilet. Flowers were used in profusion, particularly to decorate one's hair, and elegant styles of coiffure were in vogue, some being named after birds, e.g., *suathuti*, *lotan* etc.

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The young children of rich families,—both male and female,—were given costly ornaments, e.g., ornaments for the feet called *magra* and *khadu*, jewelled necklace, bangles, armlets and ear-rings. Children were often draped in yellow, the colour commonly associated with the child Krishna.

Dice was the most favourite pastime of the rich. There were several other indoor games such as *bagchali* and the 'sand-game'. The latter was a form of gambling. Music, dramatic performances and listening to Puranic stories were popular entertainments. The 'pigeon game' also appears to have been popular. This game was something like a race, and the owner of the bird which came first would be declared the winner. Ruparama mentioned another game, *idik*, as one which was played in the streets. Military displays by professional soldiers with javelins, swords and *raibans* provided entertainment for their masters. Picnic was still another form of recreation.

Religious festivals on a grand scale were perhaps more important than games or pastimes as a source of entertainment and recreation. The 'thirteen ceremonies in twelve months' were no mere casual proverb in the 16th-17th centuries. Besides the '*vratas*' already mentioned there were such others as *Itu* or *Ithural*, still not obsolete, *Dharmaekadasi* observed in honour of Dharma, and special '*vratas*' undertaken in fulfilment of vows to particular deities, such as Shashthi. Durga was worshipped with great pomp and a large number of animals were sacrificed on these occasions. Among the living creatures sacrificed in honour of the deity, there were besides the usual buffalo and goat, several others such as sheep, carps and swans. On the day of the immersion ceremony, the procession carrying the earthen image would be led by dancing girls and the image thrown into some river to the accompaniment of abuses. Another popular ceremony was '*holi*' or the colour-festival on which occasion platforms or pandals (*dolmancha*) were set up in the gardens of the rich.

III. The life of the poor.

Our sources have naturally less to tell us about the humble annals of the poor, but that little is not without significance. The poor man in Bengal in the early days of Mughal rule suffered specially due to the prevalent political insecurity and

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administrative chaos. Towards the end of our period, peace descended on the land. But until then, the forms of oppression were many and varied. The implications of the wars and rebellions and the character of the administration,—whether in the hands of the *zamindars* or in those of the officers,—in the context of the life of the people have been discussed in Chapter *I*. The life-story of Mukundarama and Kshemananda-Ketakadasa,—the latter, incidentally, wrote in the middle of the 17th century, long after the consolidation of Mughal rule in Bengal,—show how official or *zamindars'* oppression forced people long settled in a locality to quit and seek new shelters. An oppressive *zamindar* might even turn the poor ryots overnight into slaves. The poor were in a state of perpetual indebtedness. The wily money-lender sat at the door when the corn was ripe so that the debtor-ryot had no means of escape. The middleman-financier withheld payment of advances to the spinner and thus beat down the price of yarn. In case of flood or any other calamity, the ryot had only the *mahajan* to fall back upon, one can well guess with what results.

The poor lived in thatched houses which were hardly any useful shelters even if there was a light rain. As Tavernier observed with reference to the houses of the carpenters at Dacca, these were, "properly speaking, only miserable huts made of bamboo and mud." Others were made only of mud and clay. Manrique, however, found them very clean and spread with cow-dung. The only furniture of the poor were straw mats, '*kanthas*' and a few earthen pots (Manrique mentioned a specific number : four). The general standard of health was apparently very low. Shihabuddin Talish mentioned the 'fatal and loathsome diseases' prevalent in Bengal,—leprosy, leucoderma, elephantiasis, cutaneous eruptions, goitre and hydrocele;—from which the happier clime of Assam was free.

As regards food, the poor,—according to Manrique,—were satisfied with rice and salt, a little '*saga*' (herbs) and a few simple stews. '*Amani*' (stale rice-water) was a common and major item of the poor man's diet, and holes were dug into the mud-floor to serve as cups for this humble dish. Only the well-to-do could afford milk and milk-products. Curd and a cheap sweet made of milk, jaggery and oil-seed are however mentioned in *Chandimangala* as rare delicacies which the poor

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could afford on rare occasions. Fish too was not taken either very often or in large quantities, specially by those who lived inland or far from the rivers. But the inventiveness of the Bengali brain sought to relieve the monotony of this simple diet through culinary experiments not entirely without success. Lentil cooked with cocoanut-water, fried seeds of jack-fruit spread with lemon juice, spinach cooked with sour fruits,—such were some of the delicacies which even the poorest could afford. So the fate of the poor in Bengal was to some extent better than that of his counterpart in Upper India who, according to Pelsaert, took every day the same unvarying '*khichri*' and fried lentils. The poorer classes of the population,—or at least some among them,—could afford an occasional meat diet, being undeterred by taboo. Burnt mongoose and lizards, ducks, eggs and porcupine flesh were taken by the hunters and, we may assume, also by others belonging to the lowest rung of society. The poor man generally could not afford to take any intoxicants, but the distribution of *bhang* and opium to encourage sailors and workers, mentioned by Nathan, suggests that the poorer folk were no total strangers to addiction.

The dress of the poor people conformed to their general standard of living, that is to say, it consisted of the irreducible minimum required by conventions of civilised society. Men and women, according to Abul Fazl, for the most part went "naked wearing only a cloth (*lungi*) about the loins". On festive occasions they, however, wore very clean, white clothes. The dress of a poor huntsman, as described by Mukundarama, had a simple elegance. The hunter's child wore a wreath of iron sticks round his neck, with a tiger's claw as pendant. His cloth was red, his hair was tied with net and crystal ear-tops adorned his ears. The grown-up hunter's dress was also similar ; and when he went out on his day's errand, he rubbed his body with red dust,—his only toilet. Women of the poorer classes satisfied their natural instinct for self-adornment with ornaments of bell-metal, and '*calai*' (tin) and at best wore 'silver hoopes about their necks and armes' while their legs were also 'ringed with silver and copper and rings made of elephant's teeth'.

The recreations which the poor could afford were of course few. Most of these centred round religious festivals or public

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functions of a semi-religious character. In the open pandals where '*panchalis*' were read and sung or the '*kathak*' told stories from the Puranas, the village folk gathered and constituted the bulk of the audience. The Vaishnava '*mahotsavas*' were open to all and sundry, and the Durga-*puja*, arranged by the rich, provided entertainment for the poor as well. The '*gajan*' or religious procession attended by the beating of drums and ritual dances in honour of Dharma was chiefly a poor man's festival. The same is true of '*charak*' held in honour of Siva, an occasion on which the devotees pierced their backs and tongues with sharp arrows and hooks.

Natural calamities affected the poor very severely. Any great famine did not occur in Bengal during our period, but there was a minor one in 1625. Besides, scarcity followed almost invariably in the wake of wars and campaigns and we have noted elsewhere how prices went up and famine conditions ensued at such times. So the life of the poor, never very happy in this land, must have been particularly gloomy during those years of storm and strife. Still, perhaps the natural fertility of the soil and the abundance of supplies reduced to some extent the sufferings caused by an inequitous economy and political turmoils.

IV. The life of the Muslims.

The life of the Muslim community in Bengal was marked by some distinctive features. The Muslim inhabitants of Bengal were divided into at least four sections on a racial basis : the Saiyads, the Mughals, the Pathans and the natives of Bengal. The new converts from Hinduism were known by the name of *Gaysal*. Here as elsewhere there were several clans among the Pathans, *e.g.*, Subali, Nehali, Pani, Kudani, Huni etc. Certain professions were monopolized by the Muslims. Each of these professions had apparently assumed the character of something like a caste. There were among these the cake-seller (*pithari*), the fish-seller (*kabari*), the paper-maker (*kagaji*), the cloth-dyer (*rangrej*), the '*hajam*' or barber whose special job was circumcision of children, the '*kasai*' or butcher who sold beef, the tailor, the weaver and so on. An interesting sub-caste was the '*Golas*', i.e., Muslims who had been disgraced for their non-observance of fast and ritual prayer.

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The Muslim aristocrats and officers lived in a grand style and almost made a cult of display. Wherever they went, they were constantly attended by a numerous retinue of servants—slaves, both black and brown, guards, lackeys, valets and the like. The governors and high officers would be followed even on a short journey by a magnificent train of elephants, horses, cavaliers and infantrymen displaying colourful streamers and liveries and carrying for the convenience of the noble master parasols, goblets and even bath-tubs. The richest had in their service servants with specialised functions, *e.g.*, wood-cutters, water-carriers, palanquin-bearers etc. When they went out on longer journeys in their luxurious palanquins, or ox-drawn carriages they were surrounded by music-makers playing on flutes and tambourines while guards, cooks, valets and slaves carried 'arms, banderoles, victuals, tents and all that is necessary for the convenience of the voyage'.

The Mughal grandees, while serving out their term of office in this outlying province, constructed bungalows and 'lofty mansions' with bamboos or the wood of betel-nut trees in their places of sojourn. Some of these structures were even three-storied. But in remote villages an officer might condescend to live in a mud-house with thatched roof. Generally they tried to live as much after the grand style which was their usual habit as the circumstances permitted. So even in God-forsaken corners of the country their houses had '*hammams*' or bath-rooms, a rare luxury in Bengal, while in the houses of the Mirzas there were even audience-halls decorated with rich cushions and canopies. The houses of the Muslim gentry were big and spacious with beautiful apartments and halls. Many of these were flat-roofed and had beautiful gardens, green arbours and even covered walks. Some even had bathing pools and fish-ponds.

Rich Persian carpets and fine mats covered the floor in the houses of the rich. The Muslims had benches and tools as well, but they preferred to sit cross-legged on their mats and carpets. In the sixties of the seventeenth century Schouten found that the richest merchants of Hugli and Pipli had paltry chairs in their stores for the convenience of the Dutch merchants with whom they had dealings. Some also kept gold and silver plates for purposes of display.

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The Muslims generally shaved their heads and kept beards. The well-to-do among them put on long *cabayas*, 'made of the finest cotton cloths, silk stuffs, or gold and silver and of all the costliest things'. These dresses came down to the knee, were folded round the neck and attached with knots in front from top to bottom. Red and white silken sashes with tassels, from which would hang beautiful scimitars, were also used. Cotton or silk vests were worn next to the skin. Their breeches coming down to the ankle were very long and proportionately wide. These were very narrow at the bottom, being gathered tightly round the legs and usually made of striped red cloth. Their shoes were 'big and broad . . . ., ordinarily made of embroidered red leather' and worn without laces or buckles. The turbans were made of very long pieces of fine white cotton or silk cloth with stripes of gold. A silken shoulder sash was used while going out and the court-dress was made 'nearly all of brocade'. The Mullas, however, were very modestly dressed, 'all in white from head to foot' even when they attended court. In the hours of relaxation the rich too would be dressed simply in a *lungi*, an underwear, a belt and a turban. The Muslim ladies put on 'a big piece of very fine cotton cloth round their body, beginning at the waist' and coming down to the ankles. Drawers of light stuff were also worn. Another piece of cloth and occasionally also a shoulder sash were used to cover the upper part of the body; but the ladies, we are told, generally preferred while at home to go about bare-bodied down to the waist. Ornaments were used in profusion and there were some whose arms were 'adorned therewith up to the elbow'. While going out, they covered their face with a silken veil.

It appears that even the Muslims who came to settle in Bengal from other parts, had adopted rice as their staple food though Indian breads,—'very fine biscuits', according to Schouten's description,—made of wheat products were at times used. 'A lot of fowl cooked in various fashions', birds' meat, conserves and fruits were the favourite dishes. At Gaur, Manrique was treated by a Mirza to a variety of dishes which included various meats, pickles, cucumber, radish, lemons and green chillies soaked in vinegar, various sweets and finally dried fruits from Persia and Kashmir. No wonder that the meal took 'a weary three hours'. The menu would be comparatively

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simple in a very big feast and might consist only of *khushka*, bread cooked with *ghi* and water and a sweet dish called *khirsa*. The majority of Muslims did not take wine or other strong drinks, at least in public. But Schouten claimed to be 'an eye-witness of the fact that they drink long draughts of arack and such other liquors secretly and on the sly'. He also mentioned another intoxicant commonly in use at the time, viz., 'small round balls of a paste made of many aromatic seeds mixed with opium'.

The grave manners and florid etiquette of the Muslim upper classes earned the praise and admiration of foreigners. In social gatherings, they spoke 'in a very low voice, with much order, moderation, gravity and sweetness'. "Often they speak into each other's ear," writes a 17th century traveller, "and then they put the end of their shoulder-sash or their right hand in front of their mouth, for fear of inconveniencing each other with their breath". Betel and betel-nut were presented to the visitors and they were escorted with much civility at the time of departure. Rigid forms were also observed at meals, licking one's fingers being considered particularly boorish; but wiping the hand on one's clothes at the end of a meal was apparently no taboo.

The pace of life of the rich Muslims in Bengal was pretty fast. Banquets and feasts with plenty of music and dances were almost a part of their daily routine. In such feasts, otto of roses was sprinkled profusely and the guests were given presents. It was the height of good form to accept only a part of these presents. These recreations were seldom very innocent. Courtesans and nautch girls were almost invariably their central features and the big banquets became scenes of little-concealed debauchery, which no one seemed to mind. Purer forms of amusement were however not unknown. The officers posted in Bengal often held soirees to listen to story-telling, recitation of poems and reading of books. Dice was their favourite indoor game. Polo or *chaugan*,—for which there was a special playground at Dacca,—elephant-fights, hunting, excursions and picnics were also very popular with them.

Besides the Id-ul-fitr, Iduzzoha and Muharram, in this period the Muslims also celebrated the King's birth-day and the New Year's Day (*Nawroz*). On the occasion of the Iduzzoha

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the Persians, we are told, sacrificed a camel decorated with roses and other flowers to the accompaniment of strange gestures ; and after the usual feast, there would be 'songs, dances and many types of games'. The Muharram was celebrated in much the same way as at present, but with one notable difference : the day's pageantry terminated with a ceremonial destruction of the straw-figures of Yezid and Simar. The Muharram so roused the frenzy of the faithful that it was safer for the Hindus to stay indoor on these occasions. During Ramzan the Muslims went to the mosques at night with lanterns to offer their midnight prayers.

Every town had a big principal mosque and several smaller ones. The mosques of Bengal were generally very low,—ordinarily the walls were not more than two yards in height,—and for that reason built on high ground in order to make these appear higher than the other buildings. The mosques mostly had square bases, flat roofs and very white walls. There would be many tombstones in the adjoining yard and a number of houses and apartments around the prayer-hall. For ablutions before prayer, some of the mosques had around their walls large ditches full of water, 'like rivers' ; others had big cisterns at the entrance. The mosques, we are told, were 'built with stone (brick ?) and lime, but the rest of the materials were very flimsy'. Their revenue was very moderate. The Mullas were only assured of the rent of the houses around the mosques and had to depend for the rest on charities, presents and the testamentary bequests of the devout. They did not draw any salary, but were given lodgings in the houses around the mosques. They also had some income from the schools run by them and the services which they rendered on occasions like marriage. When animals were slaughtered in accordance with Islamic regulations, the Mulla had a share in the meat,—the head, we are told, being usually reserved for him. Some of the Mullas had a great reputation for learning ; others remained celibate and lived a life of great austerity ; others still remained in solitude, separated from the rest of the world, 'passing nearly all their days and nights in meditation and prayer'.

The children of the well-to-do were carefully educated. 'The mosques served as schools, the Mullas as teachers'. The

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children were first taught to read and write and made to study the Quran very thoroughly. Then they studied some particular subject,—e.g., philosophy, rhetoric, medicine, poetry etc.,—according to the future vocation chosen for them by their guardians. The children of the poor learned some trade or other while some of them became servants or soldiers.

The Muslims betrothed their children between the age of six and eight, but the marriage was not solemnized before they had attained the age of puberty. When a girl reached this age, she was adorned with flowers, and taken to some river where a ceremony was held. Then came the day of marriage. On this day the bridegroom's party brought out a gala procession which would march through the main thoroughfares. The bridegroom sat on a richly caparisoned horse while parasols of paper, silk or some other light stuff were held over his head. The marriage was solemnized by a Mulla in the presence of a Qazi who acted as witness. Betel, arack and some other delicacies were served in the feast which followed. In the houses of the rich the marriage festivities continued for several days. On the day after the marriage, the near relations of the couple would come to inspect the nuptial bed to look for the signs of consummation and evidence of the bride's virginity. If they were satisfied, they would 'testify to it with great transports of joy'; but the lot of husbands less fortunate in their marriage was truly awful.

Among the richer classes both polygamy and divorce are said to have been very much in vogue. While a husband might kill his faithless wife with impunity, the betrayed wife had no means of redress. Schouten, however, informs us that if a wife could prove before the Qazi that her husband had beaten her or did not provide her with maintenance, she could secure dissolution of marriage, though not without a great slur on her reputation. In such cases the girl children went with their mother while the boys stayed with the divorced husband. If this account be true, then Muslim women in 17th century Bengal had more privileges than are sanctioned by a strict interpretation of Islamic law.

Economy was not the forte of rich Muslim ladies and household expenditure cost the husbands quite a lot. The rich girl would bring from her father's house a number of slaves and maidservants. To this none too small retinue the husbands

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would add the guards of the harem,—black slaves and eunuchs—"often in this way throwing the sheep into the mouth of the wolf". Still some of them were rich enough to have, sailor-like, a wife in every town 'where there affairs called them'. In each of these places they would have a separate establishment for a wife or concubine, so that when they went there they found "everything quite ready,—their house, their home, the caresses of their wives". *Purdah* was observed very strictly. The ladies had a separate apartment which was their common dormitory, dining hall and living room all rolled into one.

Debauchery was the rule of the day so far as the upper classes were concerned. Prostitutes were brought freely to the homes of the rich,—both Hindus and Muslims. A banquet in which the guests were not treated to this particular variety of entertainment was a slur on the host's reputation. The Mughal officers competed shamelessly for the female booty secured from the ryots' homes. Some were worse depraved and had the cheek to write ecstatic passages on their love-affairs with eunuchs, a perversion not sanctioned even by the lax moral code of the 17th century. The clean life of the humbler folk offered a pleasing contrast to the perpetual saturnalia which was the life of the rich.

V. Army and warfare ; penal code and prisons.

The soldiers constituted an important element of the population and in the troubled first half-century of Mughal rule warfare was a daily occurrence in many parts of the country. The armies of the local chiefs consisted mainly of infantry and cavalry, though elephants also were used. The cavalry is said to have been manned mostly by Muslims. The different elements in the infantry were classified according to the weapons they used, *e.g.*, the '*dhalis*' who used shield and sword, the '*dhanukis*' or archers and so on. Long javelins were also used. The infantrymen were dressed in short *dhoties* tightly worn (*viradhari*), had their hair tied with nets and jingling ornaments on their feet. The cavalrymen wore mail-coats and carried small guns (*tufang*) on their horses. They were also armed with bows, arrows, shields, small pikes, sabres and daggers. Cannon was carried in carts. The artillery consisted of several types of weapons, *e.g.*, cannon, *zamburak*, *ramchangi* and musketry. War-elephants carried a

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small tower on their back in which would sit three or four men armed with arrows and javelins. Sometimes the elephant would also carry a swivel-gun. Maces were tied to the trunks of elephants and their foreheads were painted red. They were placed in front of the army and used as ramparts as also to bring about confusion in the ranks of the enemy. Flags tied to bamboo poles and music from various instruments, *e.g.*, war-drums, *rudravina*, cymbals and the like, added colour to the scene.

The camps of the army would cover a wide area. The soldiers' tents were arranged in good order and the commander's tent, which was higher than the rest, would be placed in the middle of the camp with good space all around. Small foraging parties were regularly sent out from the camp to plunder the neighbouring countryside,— a custom which entailed great suffering on the people.

The penal code was very severe in those days. Persons convicted on charges of petty larceny were flogged ; death or mutilation was the punishment for more serious crimes. A dark dust-laden room where moles abounded was generally used for confining prisoners. The prisoner was put in chains, his legs were cuffed and a rope was tied to his hair to prevent movement. At times the guards put a block of stone on his chest by way of punishment.

VI. The moral standard.

It is a deplorable fact that no foreigners had anything good to say about the character of the Bengali people. De Laet described them as being of 'subtle, but depraved character'. The men, according to him, were notorious for theft and robbery, the women for immodesty and vice. "Lechery and foul commerce", wrote Schouten, "are common and ordinary things in the whole of India. But in . . . . Bengal and some other countries, in this respect, things are even worse than elsewhere". Manrique found the Bengalis 'a languid race and pusillanimous', 'mean spirited and cowardly', whose popular proverb "*mare tacur, na mare cucur*" (one who thrashes you is a god, one who does not is a dog),—this grotesque adage was quoted by the Padre in original,—summed up their character and attitude to life. When one remembers Bowrey's high

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praise for the intellect of Bengali Brahmins, one cannot explain away such statements as being merely due to the foreigner's prejudice. Perhaps a decay had long set in and the people's moral was in an advanced state of disintegration. The Muslims' greatest delight, we are told, was 'in keeping whores and elephants'. Native chiefs like Bhim Narain of Kuch Bihar never removed their lips from the tip of the cup and desired nothing but 'companionship with graceful (women) resembling the cypress in stature'. What was worse, as Manrique noted with insight, the people had learnt to "easily accustom themselves to captivity and slavery".

NOTES ON AUTHORITIES

Section I. For the rites mentioned in this section, see *Raghunandana, samskaratattvam; Chandimangala,* 53, 138; *Dharmamangala,* 46, 124; *Chaitanya Bhagavata, adikhanda,* IV, V. For the education of the young see *Chandimangala,* 272-73; *Dharmamangala,* 18. For marriage customs, see *Chandimangala,* 57-9, 77, 109, 142-45, 149-53, 213-16; *Dharmamangala,* 59-69, 87; *Chaitanya Bhagavata,* 59-61; *Lochanadasa,* 37, 59, 65-67, 69, 70-75; 153 etc.; *Manrique,* I, 66. For the ideals and conditions of family life, see *Dharmamangala,* 18ff (joint family); *Chandimangala,* 23, 25, 31, 53-60, 67, 78, 83, 88, 101, 139, 144, 273 etc.; For superstitions, see *ibid.,* 52, 69, 76, 246 etc. *Chaitanya Bhagavata, adikhanda,* IV. For the last days of a Hindu, see *Purchas,* X, 114-15.

Section II. For the chiefs' courts, see *Dharmamangala,* 49, 66; *Chandimangala,* 221; *Premavilasa* (Berhampore edition), 175-76. For description of towns, see *Chandimangala,* 11, 140, *Abdul Latif's Travels; Fathiyya-i-ibriyyah,* 14; *J.A.S.B.,* 1872, 67; *Bowrey,* 150; *Thevenot,* 95; *Early Travels,* 27-8. For houses and buildings, see *Chandimangala,* 94-5; *Dharmamangala,* 78, 79; *Schouten,* I, 189, 207; *Early Travels,* 28; *Ain,* II, 134; *Baharistan,* 55a, 56a; *tr.,* I, 138-39. For the interior of a house, see *Chaitanya Bhagavata, madhyakhanda,* VII; *Chandimangala,* 164, 198, 202; *Dharmamangala,* 114; *Schouten,* I, 209. For means of transport and communication, see *Ain,* II, 134; *Chandimangala,* 90, 109, 130, 219; *Dharmamangala,* 66; *Schouten,* I, 198-99. For food and dress, see *Manrique,* I, 61-6, 256, 435; *Early Travels,* 28; *Chandimangala,* 107, 109, 112, 147, 194, 196-97, 314; *Chaitanyacharitamrita, madhya lila,* III; *Chaitanya Bhagavata, madhyakhanda,* IX; *Jayananda,* 139; *Dharmamangala,* 33; also the relevant chapter in *Aspects of Bengali Society.* For women's ornaments and toilet, see *Chandimangala,* 74, 90, 91, 172, 190 etc.; *Dharmamangala,* 30-32, 77, 107 etc.; *Manrique,* I, 62-3; *Lochanadasa,* 40; *Gangamangala,* 41. For games, see *Dharmamangala,* 127; *Chandimangala,* 256; *Chaitanyacharitamrita, madhya lila,* XII. For *'pujas'* and *'vratas'*, see *Dharmamangala,* 69; *Chandimangala,* 41-2; *Manrique,* I, 73.

Section III. For the oppression of the poor and various forms of

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exploitation, see *Dharmamangala,* 49; *Chandimangala,* 31, 35, 37, 39. For the houses of the poor, see *ibid.*, 83; *Manrique,* I, 64; *Tavernier,* I, 128. For various diseases, see *Fathiyyah-i-ibriyya,* 54. For the poor man's food, see *Manrique,* I, 128; *Chandimangala,* 37, 53, 54, 60-61 etc.; *Baharistan,* 21a; *tr.,* I, 62. For their dress, see *Ain,* II, 134; *Chandimangala,* 5; *Manrique,* I, 62-4; *Early Travels,* 27-28. For their recreations, see *Dharmamangala,* 70; *Chandimangala,* 44; Bowrey, 197-98. For the famine of 1625, see *Manrique,* I, xxvii (introduction).

Section IV. For the life of the Muslims, see *Chandimangala,* 102-3; *Baharistan,* 50b, 55a, 75b-76a, 148a, 211b, 221a, 221b, 275b, 276b, 287, etc.; *tr.,* I, 124-25, 138, 197, 278; II, 455, 486, 642, 645, 674, etc.; *Manrique,* I, 21, 127-28; *Bowrey,* 207, 216; *Schouten,* I, 170-204; *Pelsaert,* 65-7; *Abdul Latif's Travels.*

Section V. For army and warfare, see Schouten, I, 201-202; *Chandimangala,* 113-14; *Dharmamangala,* 52-4; *Gangamangala,* 21; *Fathiya-i-ibriyyah,* 16. For the penal code and prisons, see *Chandimangala,* 121, 350 etc.; *Schouten,* I, 200.

Section IV. For the morals of the Bengalis, see *De Laet,* 73; *Manrique,* I, 64; *Bowrey,* 205-206, 216; *Fathiyya-i-ibriyyah,* 14; Schouten, I, 151.

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CHAPTER VII

THE FOREIGNERS IN BENGAL

I. People from various lands: glimpses of their life.

Foreigners from many countries who came to Mughal Bengal, drawn chiefly by prospects of trade, gave a touch of exotic colour to the life of the period. Of them the Portuguese were of course the most numerous. But there were the others too. Only a few years after Bengal had become a *subah* of the Mughal empire, an Englishman, Ralph Fitch, sailed down from Agra, walked or rowed across a considerable part of the province as far as Kuch Bihar, visited practically all the important places and sailed away again in a Portuguese ship from Sripur to Pegu. To the trading centres on or near the coast, there came once or twice a year a Dutch ship or two to sell the wares of the East Indies and get laden with cloths, foodstuffs and the like. By 1625, near the end of our period, they made bold to sail up the Hugli to the interior of the land, and started their first factory at Chinsura very near the main stronghold of the Portuguese. Then with 3 or 4 boats they traded "from port to port all the year long" buying cheap provisions and transporting them to better markets. Even an occasional Frenchman, like Francois Pyrard de Laval, visited the Portuguese settlement of Chittagong. The Bengali perhaps found little to distinguish between these white people of various nations moving about in baggy breeches and they must have all been lumped together as 'Saib', if considered respectable, or as 'Firingis', if not so.

But there were other foreigners too, easily distinguishable from the white Europeans. Thus in quest of gold came the traders from many countries of Asia,—Persians, Mughals, Armenians, Central Asians and of course the Hindusthanis. Of the life of these varied people, we unfortunately know little. The Persian, Mughal and Central Asian merchants, as also the

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Afghan aristocracy who had become very much the natives of the province, almost surely lived after the same manner as the upper strata of Muslim society in general. A common faith and the common knowledge of one language perhaps acted as a cementing bond and a breaker of barriers and thus helped the strangers from across the north-western mountains to feel at home in this distant land. But the Armenians who, despite the smallness of their community, still lead a distinct exclusive life, surely at that time too maintained their exotic individuality being marked out from the rest of the people by their roseate complexion, their loose antique drapery, their sharp aquiline features of often uncommon beauty and their steadfast adherence to a faith unlike everyone else's. In his devotion to Christ, however, the Armenian Christian found a common ground on which he could meet the Catholic Portuguese. This and perhaps the latter's control over local commerce,—the extent of which rendered any successful rivalry practically impossible and co-operation almost essential,—brought the two communities somewhat close together. This is evident from the later appearance of Armenian tombstones in Portuguese churchyards and of epitaphs in Portuguese alongside those in Armenian engraved on these. Even in this early period, there were perhaps among the Armenians in Bengal many "an eminent merchant, honoured by Kings and respected by Governors" who "had travelled . . . . all the four quarters of the world" like Khojah Johannes, the founder of the Armenian Church in Chinsurah, whose body was laid to rest in 1697. And perhaps in this province too the Armenian merchants ran about from place to place buying all they could lay hands on and thus raising the price of things, as they did in Hindustan, to the great disgust of the Dutch factor, Pelsaert. Tavernier in the second half of the 17th century came across four Armenian merchants at Patna who traded in images of yellow amber which were in great demand in the kingdom of Bhutan. As the pious Catholic noted with disgust, "Wherever the Armenians see that money is to be made they have no scruple about supplying materials for the purposes of idolatry". But if the Armenians were too greedy to be scrupulous, perhaps they were poor as well. The French traveller 'was inclined to believe that money lacked them, for

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it did not appear that they had much of it'.

Another community which could be clearly distinguished from the rest, was the Africans. Leaving aside the Abyssinian eunuchs and slaves in the service of Mughal officers and aristocrats, the Africans appear in our sources as mercenaries in the service of local Rajas. The Portuguese who carried on an extensive slave-trade all over Asia and Africa and at Goa were particularly fond of negro slaves, might have been responsible for the import of many of these black soldiers into Bengal. The negro mercenaries in the service of the Raja of Sripur, at any rate, spoke the Portuguese language. And the Portuguese in their settlement of Dianga were also served by negroes. Beyond this little, however, we know practically nothing about the life of this people who constituted a small but interesting section of Bengal's population in our period.

II. The state of law and order in Portuguese settlements.

Our knowledge of the life of the Portuguese in Bengal during the first fifty years of Mughal rule is more complete. Our authorities repeatedly inform us in a mood of generalisation that the Portuguese of Bengal were "without Forts and Government, every man living after his own lust and for the most part, they are such as dare not stay in their places of better Government, for some wickedness by them committed". Of the many pirates and buccaneers for whom plunder was the only regular means of livelihood, this description is surely correct. Equally correct it must have been of the unruly Portuguese at Chittagong and Dianga, who truly lived under no form of subjection to God or man. The traders and soldiers who, in quest of trade or jobs had gone and settled in the far-off back-waters of civilization also lived in 'Luste and Discord' and at times had to be excommunicated. More than 2500 persons, pure Portuguese and Mesticos, were living in Bengal as refugees and outlaws serving native chiefs. Pedro Tavares, when he set out to organise the infant settlement of Hugli under the protection of an Imperial *farman*, welcomed and subsidised readily every Portuguese or Luso-Indian riff-raff and outlaw—"highway robbers and men of loose lives",—who cared to tramp in. No wonder that in the early years of its history, the pace of life at Hugli was pretty fast. In course

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of time, however, Hugli came to possess all the features of a free, organised and civilised settlement, except for such habitual lapses as the buoyant Latin spirit could not very well avoid. Beyond the payment of *sair* duties, the Portuguese at Hugli acknowledged in no way the suzerain authority of the Grand Mughal. Even the payment of revenue soon became irregular. The *Capitan Convidor*, annually elected by the citizens, was obeyed by all. At the time of the siege of Hugli, the Captain distributed the muskets and appointed subordinate Captains in charge of the defence. The citizens held meetings to decide on the course of action. Elsewhere in the Portuguese settlements in or near the towns directly under the Mughals, such as the capital, Dacca, there was surely a lesser degree of independence than in the free cities of Hugli and Chittagong. But there was little interference with the daily life of the Portuguese specially in the days of Jahangir who, in his fondness for this people, granted them many exemptions, privileges and fertile lands.

III. The Portuguese merchants.

The element in the Portuguese society which in the long run played the most important part in the life of Bengal was the trading community. They were the first to open the gates of Bengal to European trade and commerce. Perhaps to the contemporary Bengalis the word 'Firingi' meant, above all, piratical marauders whose excesses far surpassed in volume and intensity all other forms of Portuguese activity in Bengal. But time has healed the wounds which they inflicted, while the effects of Portuguese trade have proved to be more enduring. On the eve of our period, the Portuguese traders came to sojourn rather than to stay and we have noted elsewhere how the duration of their stay lengthened from months to years till at last they settled at Hugli. Those who thus settled had at their disposal the advantage of a wide experience in trade. For even while they waited for an imperial farman, they brought to the ports of Bengal the wares of all the Indies, Malacca, China, the Philippines, the Western coasts of India and the adjacent islands. As they settled down, while the traders from those foreign parts continued to come now there was also a return current from Bengal to Pegu, Ceylon, the

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Indies and Portuguese India. Nearer home, they sailed up to Patna in their frigates with their imports from abroad and brought back to Bengal in return Jaunpur carpets, ambertis and the like. This trading community was enriched from time to time by fresh though not always good blood. The 'highway robbers and men of loose lives', financed by Pedro Tavares, soon became successful merchants. Soldiers and pirates often preferred this quieter mode of life after a period of adventurous living. In course of a few decades, many of them earned enormous fortunes. Along both the banks of Hugli they owned extensive properties. Martin Alfonso de Mello who, according to Cabral, was responsible for the Mughal attack on Hugli is said to have aroused the aggressor's cupidity with tales of "the immense riches of the generally affluent Portuguese". The pious Manrique spoke disapprovingly of the conduct of Portuguese magnates, who "lived for their wealth alone", while Du Jarric lamented the spiritual poverty of these men, 'rich in worldly goods'. Writing in the days of Portuguese decline, Tavernier remarked that but for the coming of the Dutch, no iron, but gold and silver alone would be found in the Portuguese factories in India. "In spite of the Dutch having come, however, gold and silver abounded in Portuguese houses in Goa and other parts of India".

In the days of their proud opulence, many among the rich seem to have degenerated into idle parasites. "The Portingales and Mesticoes in India never worke", wrote Linschoten, ". . . . but most of them have their slaves to worke in their shops. There are some married Portingales that get their livings by their slaves, both men and women, whereof some have 12, some 20, and some 30, for it costeth them but little to Keepe them. These slaves for money doe labour for such as have need of their helpe, the women slaves make all sorts of confectures and conserves of Indian fruites, much fyne needle worke, both cut and wrought workes, and then (their maister) send the fairest and youngest of them well drest up with their wares about the streetes to sell the same". As Linschoten informs us in plain language, the slaves had other things to sell besides their needle-works and conserves, and with the unsavoury gains they thus brought home, their masters could easily maintain them as well as their own family. Some statements of Cabral and Schouten

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suggest that this custom was in vogue in Bengal as well.

Slave-trade was another source of their income. The Portuguese merchants of Hugli and other places traded freely with the Maghs and Portuguese of Dianga who brought to the ports of Bengal slaves captured from its towns and villages as also in Magh lands. These poor wretches were purchased and sent to different parts of India by Indian and Portuguese dealers. The Portuguese even had 'the audacity and effrontery to come to sell in their own country the old men with whom they did not know what to do'. They are also said to have bought up regularly Bengali prisoners for the galleys and in such large numbers, too, that they were depopulating the country. Bernier, a later authority, also refers to the Hugli merchants' league with the pirates. To quote Linschoten, again, "there are others that use exchanging of moneys and to buy money (when it cometh), as tyme serveth to sell it agayne. There are manie that doe nothing else, and become rich, specialle he that hath a good stocke". We may assume that in the days when European commerce with its consequent influx of gold was rapidly replacing the *cowries* with coins, this class of money-changers described by Linschoten flourished in Bengal as well. But even in the days of their degeneration, there were among the Portuguese 'some handie crafts men, as Hat-makers, shoe-makers, Sayle-makers and Coopers as also the manufacturers of silk and cotton stockings, breads, pickles and sweetmeats' whom Bowrey noted with admiration long after the massacre of Hugli.

IV. Portuguese soldiers, pirates and outlaws.

As a class the soldiers were perhaps only next in importance and numerical strength to the merchants and traders. If at Hugli, they were comparatively few in number (as was evident at the time of the siege), at Chittagong, Dianga and such other places, they practically were the only representatives of the white race. According to Linschoten, "all youngmen unmarried are named soldiers, which is the best name that a man can have, not that the soldiers are any waies bound or under the commandment and regiment of any Captain". The soldiers who came directly from Portugal, (known as *filias de Lisboa*) were graded into various ranks. But perhaps in Bengal as elsewhere

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the common soldier preferred to assume the proud title of *Fidalgo*, to satisfy the inherent vanity of his Latin nature. In fact the Captains, whose power depended almost entirely on the number and support of his soldiers, sought always and in every way to pander to this vanity. They invited the soldiers to banquets, gave them 'extras' from their own purses, and bought them victuals and other things in order to have the best soldiers. At the table the Captains sat together with them and used them "with great favour and curtesie, for otherwise they would not much esteem him, nor yet obey him." In Arakan, where they formed the backbone of the navy and where their wives had the right of entrance into the queen's chamber, the Portuguese were granted '*bilatas*', or revenue-producing lands, "on the understanding that they maintained a certain force of their countrymen and also *Gelias*". There the rowers who manned the boats lived on the captain's lands, under the obligation of serving whenever called upon to do so. Describing Portuguese life in Arakan Bernier wrote, 'C'était-lá la rétraite des fugitifs de Goa, de Ceilan, de Cochin, de Malague et de toutes ces autres places que tenaient autrefois les Portugais dans les Indes; ceux qui avaient abandonné leurs couvents, les gens mariés deux ou trois fois, les assassins, et en un mot les gens de sac et de corde y étaient les mieux venus et les plus considérés, et y menaient une vie detestable et tout-á-fait indigne de chrétiens, jusqu'á se massacrer at empoissoner impunément les uns les autres, et assassiner leurs propres écclesiastiques, qui souvent ne valaient pas mieux qu'eux." But at least in certain parts of India the married householder among the Portuguese tried to live more decently than his bachelor countrymen. The soldiers, we are told, were forbidden to wear mantles in order to distinguish them from married men. The latter would also "take great offence at such indecent words as the soldiers commonly used among themselves". The rigours of such invidious distinction must have been softened considerably by the universal regard in which the soldiers were held among the Portuguese. When the soldiers were not away raiding or campaigning, 'they went gravely about in stately apparel, with slaves or hired men carrying hats overhead'. Ten or twelve of them lived in a house with one or two slaves or hired Indians to serve them and wash their shirts. A few tools with a table and a

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bed for each were their only furniture, 'rice sodden with water with some salt fish' or some other cheap thing their usual repast. Often some captain or wealthy lord would provide their food. As to their dress, they had one or two good silken suits in common, and so when one went out, the others stayed at home where shirts and a pair of linen breeches were enough for their dignity. In such dress they sat all day long in their parlours or at their doors, singing and playing on the guitar or some other instrument. To the passer-by, they were 'vastly polite', and freely bid them 'enter, sit, make themselves at home and have a chat'. But at night they went forth in batches to supplement with highway robbery their otherwise slender income. These roughs are indeed said to have been mostly maintained by the wives of the Portuguese, Mesticos and Christians who bestowed "liberal rewards and giftes (upon them) to satisfie (and fulfill) their unchaste and filthy desires". Many also lived openly with '*Solteiras*' (i.e., licentious spinsters or widows). Such amours and consequent jealousies were the cause of many duels. Their children, however, were considered legitimate and generally inherited their parents' property. But this mode of life, very naturally, often failed to satisfy, specially in view of the poverty and consequent insecurity which attended it. Many sought a means of escape in trade and settled life. Gonsalves' earlier career is a typical example. They would often start at '*Chattins*' i.e., commercial travellers, who went from place to place with merchandise entrusted by some friend or other, apparently on a commission basis, until they become full-fledged traders and got married.

The small Portuguese communities scattered all over Bengal, who were cut off from their own people and did not form an integral part of the society around them had little inducement to inhibit their natural tendency towards lust and disorder. So naturally they lived after the manner of 'horses and wild animals', specially because a major part of such communities consisted of outlaws from other places. But the outlaws were not the only persons who joined the ranks of the pirates to ravage and plunder the practically defenceless coastal regions of Bengal. A commander quarrelling with his fellow captains might take to this less irksome life and would soon be joined by 'persons of better position'. But their life was not a very

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easy one. The Chittagong Portuguese, during their early days, had to wage a long war with the Maghs who surrounded them. Even after peace was formally established, the danger of treachery was always there. But their mutual relations generally were peaceful, so that now they were free to ravage the coasts and even penetrate into the interior with Magh assistance. Much has been said already about their raids and slave-trade. It should however be added that at times they sought in honourable matrimony the hands of such noble ladies as had the misfortune to fall into their hands. Through the ministration of some ardent missionary, a church-steeple would often raise its head above the thatched huts or more substantial buildings of these far-off colonies, or a visiting priest might remind the isolated communities of their Christian faith once in a long while. Even ecclesiastical wrath might occasionally fall upon their heads in the form of excommunication. The unfortunate wretches so stigmatised would welcome any priestly visitors "as Angels from Heaven and beseech them to intercede", so that at death they might be received into the bosom of the Church, no matter what their life had been.

In their naval operations, the Portuguese generally used the swift fighting crafts called galleots. These crafts had 15 to 20 benches on each side with one man to each oar, usually native *lascars* who often took their wives with them on their voyages. All vessels had two kitchens, we are told,—one for the captain and soldiers, the other for mariners and sailors. And there would also be some slaves and servants on board. The soldiers on board were all "armed with arquebuse, pike, spear, little China bucklers, bows and arrows". Collars of buffalo hide, laced jerkins, burgonets, iron helmets and very short and tight breeches were the main items of their dress on board vessel. But shoes and stockings were not used. On land, however, the soldiers of the fleet were flamboyantly attired in sailor's breeches, which required "ten ells of stuff" and were 'exceedingly ample and wide below', reaching to the ground. While sailing, they used tents of palm leaves at night for protection from rain and slept on mats, mattresses or carpets, which were folded up and laid aside in the morning. There was very little room on board ship. The trading vessels were particularly crowded, so that if any 'contrary winde' came, part of the

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luggages would have to be thrown overboard. For such boats "were so pestered with people and goods that there was scant place to lie in". Besides the 'people and goods', there were the slaves lying under the deck in scores,—the boat which took Manrique from Pipli to 'India' carried 80 of them,—tied together by ropes passed through their palms and sustained by a daily allowance of dry rice thrown to them carelessly as to birds.

V. Portuguese priests and missionaries.

The priests and missionaries, though few in number, were an important element of the Portuguese community in Bengal. The Diocese of Cochin was in the beginning at the head of all Catholic missions in Bengal, of which the Jesuits are the earliest on record. Later a Bishop of Cochin transferred the possession of the Bengal churches and the right of evangelization to the Augustinians of Goa. When Pedro Tavares organised the Hugli settlement, its spiritual government as also that of other neighbouring places was vested in the Augustinian brethren under a 'superior' or vicar-general. Under the authority of Cochin, there was at this time a vicarage first at Satgaon and later at Hugli. In 1606, the jurisdiction of Bengal passed under the newly-created Diocese of Mylapore. From these chief centres the missionaries would go out to evangelise or to minister to the needs of their fellow Christians in outlying parts, setting up Churches and monasteries wherever possible. Secular priests acting as Vicars were probably not unknown. And at times, as for instance between 1598 and 1600, Jesuit missionaries were also directly sent to preach and evangelise, when such steps were considered necessary. By 1616, Dacca, Sripur, Hugli and Pipli became official missionary centres, and new Churches had to be built particularly at places where a large concourse of merchants was wont to assemble. The priests and missionaries enjoyed a very high status in Portuguese society. The Augustinian Mission to Hugli was welcomed by all and when Manrique visited Hugli, he was received with great kindness by both the brethren and the laity. In their regular centres of activity in the heart of the organised settlements, they lived in their convents and monasteries, usually attached to churches. As to their means of livelihood, the

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Augustinians in particular declined the governmental offers of land and money and preferred to live by begging from Christians and pagans and on the quarterly grants from the Portuguese king. The less holy but more profitable occupation of trade was also no taboo to them. In fact, many priests often took to trading and hardly made any secret of it. For though trade was officially forbidden, the authorities preferred to look the other way when such delinquencies were unearthed. Further, as Linschoten observed, in Goa the lucrative exchange of money "commeth most commonlie from the Spiritualitie, who do secretly use it, by other men's meanes, without any late or hindrance". One may wonder whether the same was the case in Bengal. But not all the priests were worldly, and on the whole, one must admit, they were earnest in their spiritual exertions. We have referred elsewhere to the baptisms, confessions, conversions and reforms which constituted their usual routine. But these do not complete the list of their good deeds (assuming forced conversion to be a good deed, of course). As teachers, they taught the Bengali children in the school at Hugli. Many of them "indevoured to learne the Bengalan Language". Domingo de Souza translated into Bengali a 'tractate of the Christian religion'. Cabral had 'a sufficient knowledge' of the language and Fray Manoel de la Concepcion was 'very skilled in' it. Manrique himself preached in the Bengali language at Tambolin though, alas, to little effect. His work testifies best to the wide range of his Bengali vocabulary, in which the quaint '*babare*' and less mentionable slangs loom large. To their even greater credit, the Augustinians and Jesuits participated in relief work during the famine of 1625.

VI. The daily life of the Portuguese citizens.

Many of the Portuguese were 'marryed with the naturall borne women of the countrie', and the children of such marriages known as Mesticoes were of 'yellowish colour'. The Portuguese arrived fresh from home were the most honoured, the *casticos* or *filias de Indies* (Portuguese born in India) were next in status, while the Mulattos of seminegroid parentage and the black Christians were at the bottom of the social ladder. Whatever their social status the Portuguese throughout India had in common a most enormous vanity.

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While they walked up and down the streets, all went 'as proudlie as the best". For to their mind there was "no better than another . . . . the rich and the poore man all one, without any difference in their conversation, courtesies and companies". Their gait was marked by a great swagger and 'vaineglorious majestie'. A servant followed them carrying 'a great hat or raile over their heads'. Flowing robes of silk were their usual attire out of doors and practically everyone carried a sword or rather had it 'carried after them by a boy', that it might not trouble them as they walked, 'nor hinder their gravities'. When they met one another in the streets, florid greetings 'with a great Besolas manos' would follow. If such an elaborate gesture was not received with proper attention, naturally a fight for honour would ensue ending often in broken limbs, if not in loss of lives. The inadvertent offer to a visitor of a chair lower than the host's might also have such terrible consequences.

The tenor of life at home was however generally less hazardous and nerve-racking. Indeed the visitor from abroad found the Luso-Indian and Portuguese household most 'bountiful', kept very neat and clean with the help of 'five, six, ten, twentie . . . . slaves', the numbers varying in proportion to the master's opulence. Their usual residences were either houses in the Bengali style or more substantial buildings, in which they lived "very cleanly and sweet in all things belonging to their houses, specially in their linen". Their regular baths and frequent change of clothes also appeared very striking to the European travellers. At home the men went about in 'extremely white and fine' shirts and pyjamas with a velvet or taffeta cap called '*gualteira*' or '*monteira*' on their head. Thus clad, they would sit chatting at their doors with five or six neighbours, while slaves stood waving fans or scratched their bodies. Occasionally an acquaintance would pay a call, and if the master of the house was not too conservative, the visitor might be entertained with music 'sung and played' by the young ladies of the family 'after the Portugal manner', on a lute or guitar. Music was so much in favour that they had their slaves play to them at meals, at bed-time and while getting up. This pleasure-loving people were however very devout and all decent folk went regularly to church, if there was one at hand.

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In case there were none, they would try to secure the services of some neighbouring priest or missionary for christenings and confessions. At mass, the Portuguese would keep fingering their *pater noster* beads; the unseemly sight of fettered slaves who accompanied their masters would mar the serenity of the church service. The behaviour of the Portuguese, even at church, was marked more by ostentation than by humility; the servant carried a cushion for his master to kneel on at the time of the mass. Their ostentation was matched by their bigotry. Their zeal in forced conversions, their strong reluctance to surrender the converted at the time of the siege of Hugli, their dislike of Ganges water, holy to the Hindus,—all indicate their deep-rooted fanaticism.

The Portuguese all over the Orient mingled 'their pleasures with their devotions'. On Sundays, holidays and other feast-days all went in a procession with crosses and made 'a thousand passades and careers on their horses', so that the religious ceremonies became "like fairs, with banquets and music of all sorts of instruments". On such days, the pleasure-seekers would also go to pleasant waterside gardens or orchards and take their refreshments 'in the shade' as in a picnic. On the Christmas Eve and Holy Thursdays and Fridays, the Portuguese settlements looked particularly gay with the lanterns by the road-side and tables laid with white napery covered with thousand delicacies. 'In Churches and houses were represented the mysteries of the Nativity with diverse characters and marionettes . . .'. 'Goodly companies of hautbois, cornets-á-bouquin, drums, violins', etc. played at the church service while baubles and trinkets were sold at the gates. Even at God-forsaken Dianga, Christian festivals like the Feast of Corpus Christi were celebrated. Besides, in the Jesuit College there would be regular dramatic performance and the students would go out in procession, chanting hymns. On the occasions of marriage and christening also, there would be solemn processions with plenty of music and throwing of rose-water, followed up by small dinner parties, 'with little meate, yet costly'.

But all the amusements of the Portuguese in this country were not so innocent. There were the gambling houses, for instance, set apart for 'cards, dice and other games of Chance',

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where food, drink and excellent accommodation for the night were available as well as music to entertain the players. The poor soldiers generally frequented these places to receive shares of the gains, generously given away by the winners : this 'act of gentility' was called '*barato*'. Games of hand-ball, skittles and bowls, tricks of conjurers, mountebanks and buffoons, animal and snake shows, music (which everybody learnt) and the performance of skilled dancers were also among the common entertainments in the Portuguese settlements.

Their married women, practically cut off from the rest of the society by the strict seclusion which was then customary, lived a life of unhappy luxury. They seldom went out, except to church or to visit a friend, and even then, only in a fully covered palanquin. It was not customary for husbands and wives to meet before marriage. The men, however, tried to have a glimpse of their prospective brides without the make-up which constituted half their beauty. Their dress, out of doors, was of damask, velvet or gold-cloth,—silk being the cheapest thing they would wear,—to which were added very costly jewelleries. At home they put on a fine smock called 'baju', a painted cloth wrapped round the body from the waist and a pair of slippers. Their diet, completely Indianised, consised of rice cooked in the Indian fashion, salt fish, pickles, butter, lentils and the like which they took with their hands, the use of spoons being considered ridiculous. The Indian manner of taking water from narrow-necked earthen pots without touching these with the lips was also adopted. It excited the admiration of Pietro della Valle, and the Portuguese new-comers who failed to imitate it successfully, with obvious consequences, were ridiculed as '*reynols*'. With their frequent baths and use of perfumes and sandal-paste, the Portuguese women appeared very neat and clean. These unfortunate creatures in their seclusion had nothing to do all the day. So they sought to wear off their ennui by chewing betels, singing and playing on instruments, swimming in the pools, looking through the windows at the streets and, above all, by illicit amours in which they were often helped by obliging slaves. The last-mentioned form of amusement frequently ended in death at the hands of the husband, if a timely measure of '*dhutura*' poison administered by the wife did not forestall such dangers.

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VII. The relations of the Portuguese with the local people.

The attitude of the local people to the peaceful Portuguese settlers appears to have been friendly. The Mullas might condemn them as unclean pork-eaters, the Hindus consider them untouchable because of their fondness for beef, and those who had taken their rice be looked upon as having 'lost caste', yet generally they were quite welcome to this land, though the motives which prompted this attitude were not merely altruistic. In any case, when Pedro Tavares returned to Hugli with the imperial *farman*, the local people 'almost worshipped him'. The government was particularly interested in making the traders settle in Bengal as that would mean more trade and hence more revenue. The Augustinians at Dacca refused to accept lands and money from the government for they feared that they were expected to attract traders in return and might be expelled in case of failure. The local merchants, as also the common people, welcomed the settlers from profit motives. The Rajas of Bakla, Chandikan and Sripur, Isa Khan, the Masnad-i-Ala of Hijli and others assumed a friendly attitude in expectation of increased trade or of military service. The latter motive was the strongest in the case of the Magh Raja. Emperor Akbar, however, allowed the Portuguese to settle, not merely for reasons of trade, but also due to his eclectic spirit. Jahangir too, Bernier informs us, was very fond of the Christians and granted them many privileges for that reason. But the attitude of the local governments was not always very consistent. The King of Chandikan suddenly started persecution and so did the Arakan King on more than one occasion. About 1625 the Mughal government also is said to have participated in the persecution of the Christians. But, in general, the government in Bengal was very tolerant towards them and even protected the Christian missionaries from popular wrath.

Though the Portuguese took the fullest advantage of this tolerant attitude and also intermarried freely with the native women, they did not in any way reciprocate these sentiments. The Portuguese, in their pride, despised all,—"not only the Indians but even all the other Christian nations of Europe", whom they called "white men", a term which reminds one of an American expression, the "poor whites". The Mughals were

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looked upon as enemies of Christianity and hence their territories in Bengal were legitimate objects of plunder. The priests and missionaries naturally were the most bigoted of all. They referred confidently to the 'Gentile and Mahumetan Errours'—Hindu and Muslim religions, in more common parlance,—and stopped their fellow countrymen's lucrative trade in Ganges water and their neighbourly practice of lending clothes and jewellery to the Hindus for decorating Durga, as both were considered unchristian. The faiths of the Hindus and Muslims were declared to be roads to hell,—the second being the shorter of the two. Forced conversions were considered pious acts and surrendering a single soul converted to Christianity through most unchristian methods appeared reprehensible to most of the Portuguese settled in Bengal. Despite such an attitude, however, they pulled on well enough with the people of the country. The class which came into most intimate contact with the natives were of course the merchants and traders. In the earlier period they used to advance money to the native merchants to secure goods for them. Later the merchants of India also came to their ports to purchase the rarities and the slaves which they imported regularly. Many native merchants also settled at Hugli and their relations with the Protuguese were very friendly; during the siege of Hugli, the Portuguese captains called on the Hindu and Muslim merchants to bear witness to their good conduct before the Mughals. Occasional cases of commercial rivalry were not entirely unknown. A Mirza's opposition to the entrance of Portuguese ships at Pipli mentioned by Manrique is an instance in point. But in general, the native merchants were content to remain the lesser partners in the new trade. A verse in Ramagopala's *Sakhanirnaya* referring to Lochanadasa's life-story seems to suggest that the Portuguese also came into contact with the local people as money-lenders and in case of failure to pay back, the debtor or some one in his stead would have to forfeit his liberty to the creditor. The Portuguese mercantile community enjoyed a privileged position and was an object of the Government's special protection. Manrique and his fellow travellers, when arrested on suspicion, were assured that no injury would be done to them, if they were *bona fide* traders.

The priests and missionaries were treated with great consideration. The *shiqdar* of Hijli sent '*hadiya*' (presents of food-stuff)

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to Manrique on his arrival and received him in state. The *kotwal* of Midnapore and the Raja of Tamluk gave him further samples of Muslim and Hindu dishes. The former's feast was followed by dances which the puritanical Padre found rather lewd, but he was gracious enough to appreciate the '*shiropa*' presented to him. The merchant 'Moboto Khan' proved particularly friendly, spoke to the father in Portuguese and also sent his son to learn the language. On his journey to Portuguese India, Manrique had some merchandise entrusted to him. When the people who had been belabouring Manrique found out that he was a priest, they addressed him with due respect as '*Saib*' and '*Thakur*'. But the people's attitude was not always so reverential. The Mullas and dervishes at Dacca started an anti-Christian campaign holding the un-Islamic practice of pork-eating to special condemnation, and the Government had to exert itself to protect the missionaries. The Raja of Tamluk objected to the preaching of Christianity in his territory. The Augustinians' participation in trade also lowered their prestige in the eyes of the natives. At Dianga a Dominican missionary who tried to stop some Maghs from taking a few people into slavery had to pay for his officiousness with an eye. But the Hindus generally were more tolerant, and so long as they were not converted,—forcibly or after loss of caste due to 'taking their rice,'—preferred to listen with indifferent curiosity to the Fathers' sermons delivered in quaint Bengali. The majority of the converts called '*kalas*'—many of whom were slaves and most cruelly treated even after conversion,—had little love for their white brothers in faith and were not relied upon by the latter. Their Christianity was naturally skin-deep. But there were some who took earnestly to their new faith and could be handed back to the Mughals only under protest at the time of the siege of Hugli. With the growth of piracy, the entire Portuguese community in Bengal seems to have become suspect in the eyes of the people. The capture of such miscreants,—real or suspected,—was hailed with great jubilation and liberal doses of thrashing were administered in anticipation of more serious punishments. Many unfortunate whites like Manrique must have had taste of such popular vengeance on false suspicion. It is a significant fact that despite their many-sided

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activities, the Portuguese survive in popular imagination as pirates and plunderers only and the best-known passage referring to them in the literature of the period perpetuates the memory of their ruthless ravages along the coast.

VIII. A Portuguese settlement in Bengal : a reconstruction.

From the accounts of Manrique, his fellow missionaries and the travellers the picture of a typical Portuguese settlement rises clearly in our vision. We see the bungalows and substantial buildings of the Portuguese interspersed with the thatched roofs of the poorer natives. A lofty church-steeple rises into the sky. By its side is a monastery or a missionary residence. If it is Hugli we are thinking of, there will also be a Jesuit school and College and the Casa de Misericordia with its enormous riches. Down the street a rich magnate comes along in flowing robes with ponderous gravity, followed by a servant with an umbrella. He comes across an acquaintance and makes a florid courtesy. Black slaves and servants are running busily about on their errands. An Augustinian Father passes by in his black robe and soon a procession of college students follows chanting some solemn hymn. The native or Mestico craftsman busy in his roadside workshop looks up. Some ladies chewing betels lean forth from their windows and a group of young men sitting on their doorsteps stop their busy chatter for a while. On the river by the town there are a large number of ships from Goa, Burma, Malacca, the Indies, Manila and China. Loads of spices, sandal-wood, rich cloths and the like are being carried from the ships to the godowns. Some are being laden with cloths and food-stuffs. Slaves brought from Arakan are being dragged harshly down, to be taken to the daily market where high-pitched wranglings in Portuguese and Bengali may be heard. Suddenly there is a chatter of hoofs and the gay sound of music. A procession approaches with multi-coloured banners and crosses. It is a feast day. With nightfall the road-sides are lighted up with lanterns and there are a thousand gaieties in every house. On the river there is a busy splashing of oars. Some galleots are sailing out and soon in some hapless village fire and rapine will be let loose. All this confused bustle is suddenly swallowed up in the booming of heavy guns. The Mughals are besieging

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Hugli or the Dutch are fighting some Portuguese ship in the Bay. Presently the noise dies out and in the place of the gay busy city we see, as the smoke clears away, a poor apology for a ramshackle town.

NOTES ON AUTHORITIES

Section I. For the reference to respectable Europeans as '*Saib*', see *Manrique*, I, 42, 216. For the traders from many countries, see Cabral's letter in *Manrique*, II, 392. For the account of the Armenians given in this chapter, see Seth, *Armenians in India*, 304, 305ff, 571ff; *Tavernier*, II, 261-62. For the Africans, see *Pyrard*, II, 65-6; *Manrique*, I, 92.

Sections II-VIII. The account of the life of the Portuguese community in Bengal is based mainly on *Pyrard*, I, 26-130, 201-49; *Linschoten*, 154-85; Pimenta's letter in *Purchas*, X, 205-06; *Du Jarric*, IV, 82ff; *Bowrey*, 192-3; *Bernier*, 237-240; *Elliot and Dowson*, VII, 31-32 (*Padshahnama*); *Fathiyya-i-ibriyya;* Cabral's letter and numerous references in *Manrique*. Also see Payne, *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, 206; the Report on Christian communities in Bengal, 1599 in *Bengal: Past and Present*, 1952; the introduction to *Brahman-Catholic Samvada*; and *Campos*.

Pyrard and Linschoten described in detail mainly the life of the Portuguese community at Goa. But both had first-hand knowledge of Portuguese life in Bengal and sections of their account are explicitly stated to be descriptions of Portuguese life in 'all the Oriental countries'. Some parts of these accounts seem obviously applicable to the settled Portuguese communities in Bengal while some of their statements are directly corroborated by Manrique and others in their descriptions in Bengal. Hence the data supplied by Pyrard and Linschoten have been drawn upon wherever it seemed reasonable to do so.

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CHAPTER VIII

A RESUME

The first half-century of Mughal rule is one of the most significant epochs in the annals of mediaeval Bengal. Viewed superficially from the standpoint of manners and morals, habits and practices and generally the way of life, there is little to distinguish it from the periods that immediately followed or preceded it. In the context of the essential continuity of Bengali life, landmarks are difficult to discern in spheres such as these. Descriptive passages in mid-16th century works like *Chaitanya Bhagavata* could often be freely interchanged with those in works written a century later, Ruparama's *Dharma-mangala* for instance, with hardly a chance of detection. But if we look for special features which mark out the period under review as a distinctive one, these are but easy to find.

The years 1575-1627, saw the culmination of processes long at work. It witnessed also the first pulsations of new vital forces destined to shape the future of Bengal and the Bengalis. The processes which reached their culmination in this epoch were the neo-Vaishnava movement and the literary-cultural renaissance which had begun at least as early as the middle of the 15th century and had progressed with little interruption even through the stormy years of Mughal-Afghan conflict for supremacy. The forces which now began to operate practically for the first time in this province were Mughal imperialism and European commerce. Viewed in this light, the significance of the period under review becomes self-evident.

The neo-Vaishnava movement reached its final shape in our period and in this new form became a mighty proselytizing creed. In what exact relationship this final form stood to the teachings of the Master, is a question which cannot be decided with precision. One thing however is certain. If the original movement had any great revolutionary potentiality, much of it

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had been frittered away in course of the journey to Vrindavana and back. Still, the neo-Vaishnava movement was the most creative force in the social, religious and cultural life of the epoch under review. It worked a profound change in the thought and morals of those who were converted. Others too felt its impact. But the rigours of caste were not, as is claimed, modified to any considerable extent. No liberal humanism based on a faith in the brotherhood of man was preached. The majority were not converted. Of those who were converted, too, many went back to older ways of life through the backdoor of the Sahajiya cult. So the culmination of the neo-Vaishnava movement concealed behind a facade of superficial success the frustration of a greater promise.

The other process which now reached its climax, or rather yielded its last glorious harvest, was the literary-cultural renaissance of the Turko-Afghan period. With the establishment of the Iliyas Shahi dynasty in the middle of the 14th century, peace in a comparative sense had returned to Bengal after a long period of strife and misrule which had followed in the wake of the Turkish conquest. With the return of peace, cultural pursuits were resumed. This new development assumed significant proportions towards the middle of the 15th century. In the earlier half of the 16th century it reached its first climax and produced a crop of extraordinary talents or near-geniuses and at least one saint who left a permanent imprint on the religion, thought and social habits of his people. The literary and cultural tradition was carried on almost uninterrupted throughout the following decades mainly by the logicians and Vaishnavas. After the establishment of Mughal rule, a fresh crop of literary masterpieces were produced which marked a second climax. Then followed a period of decline.

Cultural activity did not abruptly come to a dead end and even a new literary form was evolved in the 17th century. Nyaya studies were also continued till a climax was reached towards the end of the same century. But there was no longer any galaxy of extraordinary men, and even the second climax appears limited and mediocre when compared with the first.

Of the new forces which were now at work, Mughal rule undoubtedly conferred very real benefits on the people even during the troubled first half-century of its history in this

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province. These benefits are to be estimated in terms of the peace and security which now ensued. It is to be estimated also in terms of the new commercial development facilitated by a strong government. Closer connection with the larger life of the Empire was no small gain either. Yet Bengal in the first half-century of Mughal rule was hardly a Utopia. Official oppression, *zamindars'* misrule and a revenue system which was in effect both extortionate and lacking in uniformity largely undermined the good results ensuing from the establishment of a well-ordered government. Besides, Mughal rule in Bengal maintained throughout the period under review and even during the decades to follow the character of a foreign conquest. And unfortunately, unlike some officials of another foreign government later established in the same province, the imperial *mansabdars* took less interest in the life and culture of the country than in its fair women and fairer yield of revenue. So the happy development of an earlier epoch when Bengali culture had grown through the effort of the Hindu poets and scholars under the patronage of Muslim Sultans and their officers was now at an end.

This period did not witness the real beginning of the large scale commerce with Europe which was a result of English and Dutch enterprise. The English in the first quarter of the 17th century were only looking for a chance to enter into Bengal. The Dutch traded along the coast, fought with the Portuguese for supremacy in the Bay and, according to some, even succeeded in establishing a factory at Chinsura in 1625. But the years 1575-1627 were a period of Portuguese supremacy so far as Bengal's commerce was concerned. In itself, commercial supremacy of the Portuguese in Bengal was a development without any issue. But it acted as an impetus to industry by opening the markets of Asia to Bengal's products and, what was more, chalked out the routes and indicated the lines which the commerce of the Dutch and the English was to follow in future.

Viewed as a whole, the first half-century of Mughal rule in Bengal was a period of immense importance. But it was not a glorious age, nor even a happy one. After the Mughal-Afghan wars for supremacy in Bengal, the decision in favour of one party secured peace,—but only in a limited sense. Three

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decades had to pass after the initial conquest before anything like firm government could be established over the greater part of the country. And these three decades were years of endless suffering for great masses of men. When the wars and rebellions were at last over, people enjoyed the benefits of well-ordered government. Portuguese commerce at the same time brought new wealth to the country. But neither the well-ordered government nor the new wealth could create conditions which might lead to the happy development witnessed in the earlier half of the 16th century. The great days of mediaeval Bengal were definitely at an end.

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I. ORIGINAL SOURCES

Contemporary Bengali literature is perhaps the most important source for the social history of Bengal in the early days of Mughal rule. The *'panchalis'* or *'mangalakavyas'* and the Vaishnava biographical works together afford a very clear glimpse of contemporary social life. The Vaishnava biographies are also important for a study of the history of the faith. The works which can definitely be ascribed to our period are comparatively few. Of these the *Chandimangala* of Mukundarama, *Chaitanyacharitamrita* of Krishnadasa Kaviraja, *Premavilasa* of Nityanandadasa (a history of the lives and works of Syamananda, Narottama and Srinivasa) and *Gangamangala* of Dvija Madhava have been used. These are all ascribed to the closing years of the 16th or the early ones of the 17th century. Certain literary products of the mid-16th and mid-17th centuries have also been drawn upon as the picture contained in these is substantially the same as the one found in the works of our period The works thus utilised here are *Chaitanya Bhagavata* of Vrindavanadasa. and the *Chaitanyamangalas* of Lochanadasa and Jayananda belonging to the 16th century and *Manasamangala* of Kshemananda Ketakadasa, *Dharmamangala* of Ruparama Chakravarti and Alaol's *Padmavati* and *Sapta Paykar* belonging to the 17th. Dom Antonio's dialogue between a Brahmin and a Catholic, (published under the title of *Brahman-Catholic Samvad* by Dr. S. N. Sen), a late 17th century work, is the only, surviving specimen of early Catholic writings in Bengali prose some of which are mentioned as having been produced even in our period. Besides these, the early Sahajiya texts,—the *Rasakadamba* written in 1599 and the three treatises ascribed to the first quarter of the 17th century and published in M. Basu's *Sahajiya Sahitya*,—have been used for the reconstruction of the history of the cult in our period.

The accounts of European travellers, factory records etc. belonging to our period or a slightly later one are only next in importance to the contemporary literature as source materials for the social history of our period. The earliest of these is the account of Ralph Fitch (1583-91), which contains a scrappy but first-hand description of Bengal during the years of trouble following the Mughal conquest. The accounts of Hawkins, Coryat, Terry and Fitch published in Foster's *Early Travels* also refer to Bengal, though not at any great length. The letters written and received by Sir Thomas Roe, the English ambassador to Jahangir's court (1615-19) throw much light on the commercial conditions and prospects

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in the province. A brief description of Bengal's trade and industry is to be found in Pelsaert's *Remonstrantie*, a work mainly concerned with life in Agra and Upper India in the days of Jahangir. Far more valuable, however, is Manrique's *Travels* (1629-43) which helps us to reconstruct the social conditions of the Portuguese in Bengal in that period and affords numerous glimpses of contemporary socio-economic life. The accounts of François Pyrard de Laval (1602) and Huyghen van Linschoten (1583-89) who paid brief visits to Chittagong are also important, specially for descriptions of Portuguese social life. The *Travels* of Pietro della Valle (1623-24) who never visited Bengal and had little to say about this province also contain a picture of Portuguese life in India substantially similar to the one found in the above-mentioned works. Besides these, the voluminous compilations known as *Purchas His Pilgrims* and *Hakluyt's Voyages* include several brief contemporary accounts of Bengal in our period.

Of the later accounts, the works of Tavernier (1640-60), Gautier Schouten (1658-65), Bowrey (1669-79), Bernier and Thevenot (1666-67), who all visited Bengal, are particularly important The continuity of mediaeval Bengali social life gives these later works almost the same value as contemporary ones in many respects. The *Diaries of Streynsham Master* (1575-80) occasionally used in the present work, refer mainly to changed circumstances, being confined for the most part to the commercial affairs of the English Company.

The references to Bengal in *The Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East* (1602-17) and the records published in the first three volumes of *The English Factories in India* are extremely meagre. But these are nevertheless important as objective data for the economic history of the period.

The Persian chronicles, preoccupied as they are with wars, conquests and rebellions, provide data far less important for social than for political history. Of the general Persian histories of India, only a few are of positive value for our present purpose. The account of the Bengal *subah* in the 'Ain-i-Akbari', incidental references in Jahangir's autobiography and the account of the Portuguese of Hugli in *Padshahnama* and its continuation *Amal-i-Salih* are practically all that need concern us.

The special histories of Bengal are however more useful. Of these, the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* of Mirza Nathan belongs to our period and the *Fathiyya-i-Ibriyya* with its supplement to the one immediately following. Besides, there are the *Travels of Abdul Latif* (1608-9) and the *Muraqaat-i-Hasan* (1655-67). The value of these Persian works consists, first, in an objective view of the working of the governmental machinery with its consequences and secondly, in glimpses of the life of the people and the official aristocracy. As both these are afforded by incidental references, not ostensible descriptions, these works become all the more valuable.

A number of Sanskrit works are important for the study of Hindu religious life and rituals. Though these were mostly written during the few preceding decades, there is little reason to postulate any changes in the spheres with which these are concerned during our period. The 28 *tattvas*

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of Raghunandana and the Vaishnava Smriti work *Haribhaktivilasa* were composed near about 1540. Of the Tantric works, the famous Kulachara text *Sarvollasatantra* and Krishnananda's compilation, *Tantrasara*, go back to the latter half of the 15th and the earlier half of the 16th century respectively. Brahmananda's *Tararahasya* and *Saktanandatarangini* are said to have been written shortly before our period while Purnananda's *Srita-ttvachintamani* and *Syamarahasya* are ascribed to the years immediately following and preceding the Mughal conquest respectively.

II. SECONDARY WORKS

No general history of mediaeval Bengali society conforming to scientific standards has as yet been written. But a large number of works dealing with particular aspects of mediaeval Bengal throw much light upon the subject. *The History of Bengal*, Vol. II edited by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the most authoritative work on the political history of Muslim rule in Bengal gives a brief analysis of the forces at work in the socio-economic life of the province under the Mughals. The only other general history of Muslim Bengal, Stewart's *History of Bengal*, is not very dependable, based as it is for the most part on *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, 'meagre in facts, mostly incorrect in detail and dates, and vitiated by loose traditions'. Besides, as the scope of Stewart's history is rather narrowly political, very little use has been made of it in the present work.

The numerous histories of the Bengal districts in English and Bengali, though not always very dependable as works on political history, contain various local traditions indicative of tendencies in the social and cultural life in the past. Mention may specially be made in this connection of the *Bengal District Gazetteers* and Hunter's *Statistical Account of Bengal* which constitute a storehouse of information bearing on various aspects. In the present work, the *District Gazetteers* have generally been used in preference to the *Statistical Account* as the data contained in the latter are mostly covered and supplemented by the former.

The only other work on political history which deserves mention is Mr. Campos' *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*. This work deals incidentally with an important aspect of Bengal's socio-economic life during Mughal rule and discusses the contributions of the Portuguese.

The economic history of mediaeval Bengal has not yet been written. But Mr. Moreland's works throw some light on the subject. His *Agrarian System of Moslem India* contains a chapter on Bengal, the value of which has been discussed elsewhere in this work. McPherson's *The History of the European Commerce with India* contains descriptions of the pattern of Dutch and Portuguese trade in India during our period and is hence useful for our present purpose.

Several attempts have been made in the past to reconstruct the social and cultural history of mediaeval Bengal. Of these *Vrihat Vanga*, though valuable as a pioneer work, is too much in the nature of a sweeping review to be valuable as a work of reference. Dr. T. C. Das Gupta's *Aspects of Bengali Society* and J. N. Das Gupta's *Bengal in the sixteenth century*

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contain much useful data portions of which have been studied independently and utilised in a different way in the present work. Dr. S. Sen's *Madhyayuge Vangla O Vangali* is a brief but very dependable and scientific account of mediaeval Bengali society.

We are however fortunate in having a number of standard books on literary history, the most notable of which are Dr. D. C. Sen's *Vangabhasa o Sahitya* and Dr. Sukumar Sen's *Vangla Sahityer Itihasa.* These two works also throw some light on the social conditions and tendencies of our period. *Arakan Rajsabhay Vangla Sahitya* by E. Huq and A. Karim is a study of the 17th century Muslim poets of Bengal and contains a chapter on Muslim social life of that period, based on unpublished manuscripts. Dr. S. N. Sen's introduction to *Brahman-Catholic Samvad* throws an interesting sidelight on the cultural activities of the Portuguese in Bengal. Besides these, several works on the histories of the Vaishnavas, the Sahajiyas, Islam in Bengal and various obscure cults which have some bearing on our period have also been published. Mention may be made in this connection of Dr. S. K. De's *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal,* M. T. Kennedy's *The Chaitanya Movement,* Dr. S. B. Das Gupta's *Obscure Religion Cults* and Dr. E. Huq's *Vange Sufi Prabhava.* S. C. Vidyabhushan's *History of Indian Logic* has a chapter on Navyanyaya. The introduction to the 'Catalogue of Tantra MSS. in the possession of the Royal Asiatic Society on Bengal' is useful for the history of Tantrikism in our period. D. C. Bhattacharya's *Vanglar Sarasvata Avadana* also throws much light on the cultural history of mediaeval Bengal.

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